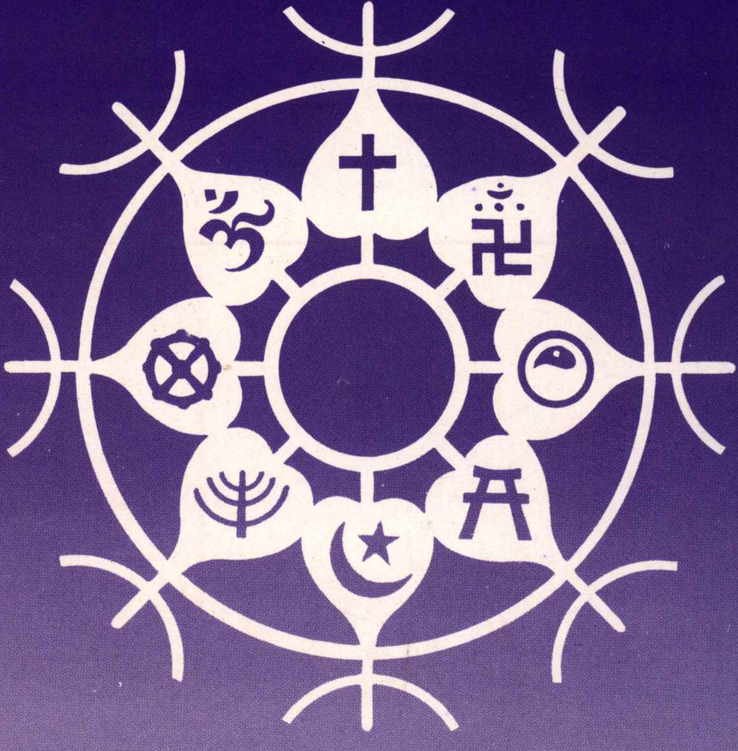
JOURNAL OF
DHARMA



RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

July-September 2003 Vol. XXVIII, No. 3

JOURNAL OF DHARMA
An International Quarterly of World Religions

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief Editor: Saju Chackalackal, *Centre for the Study of World Religions* (CSWR), *Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Dharmaram College, 560 029 Bangalore, India. Tel: +91-80-5111 6219. E-mail: editor@journalofdharma.com*

Associate Editors: Augustine Thottakara, *CSWR, Bangalore*; J. G. Arapura, *McMaster, Hamilton, Canada*; Thomas Aykara, *CSR, Pariyaram,* J. B. Chethimattam, *Nagarcoil*; Thomas Kadankavil, *Kottayam*; Thomas Kalam, *Bangalore*; Antony Kalliath, *Samanvaya, Bhopal*; Thomas Manickam, *Namibia*; Thomas Manninezhath, *Namibia*; Kuncheria Pathil, *DVK, Bangalore*; Joseph Pathrapankal, *DVK, Bangalore*; William Sweet, *St. Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia.* Kurian Kachappilly, *DVK, Bangalore*; Angela Wong Wai Ching, *Chinese University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong.*

Board of Consultants: Amaladoss, *Vidya Jyothi, Delhi*; J. P. Clayton, *Boston University, U.S.A.*; John Bowker, *Cambridge, U.K.*; Jung Young Lee, *Drew University, New Jersey*; Jyothi Sahi, *Bangalore*; G. J. Larson, *University of Indiana, U.S.A.*; Thomas Mampra, *Trivandrum*; J. Masson, *Belgium*; A. Nambiaprambil, *Upasana, Thodupuzha*; Oberhammer, *Vienna*; R. C. Pandey, *New Delhi*; Thomas Kochumuttom, *Risikesh*; Mathias Mundadan, *Jeevass, Aluva*; G. C. Nayak, *Bhubaneswar*; Raimundo Panikkar, *Barcelona, Spain.*

Book Review Editors: J. B. Chethimattam, Mathias Mundadan, and V. Venkatakrishna.

Executive Secretary: Johnson Panthalany, DVK.

Journal of Dharma is a scholarly research publication of inter-religious studies on live issues of religion, philosophy and theology. While the Editors recognize the need for free expression of differing opinions by our collaborators and contributors within the natural limits of academic freedom and responsibility, they do not necessarily subscribe to their views.

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

July-September 2003 Vol. XXVIII, No. 3

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
DVK, Dharmaram College
560 029 Bangalore, India
Tel. +91-80-5111 6111; Fax: +91-80-5111 6000
E-Mail: info@journalofdharma.com
Website: www.journalofdharma.com

CONTENTS

Editorial: Religious Festivals 301

Saju Chackalackal

1. Religious Festivals: Convergent and Divergent Factors 306

V. F. Vineeth

2. Celebration of the Feast of Epiphany Among St. Thomas Christians of India.. 323

Paulachan Kochappilly

3. Festivals, Communication and Development.................................... 340

Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj

4. Meaning and Significance of Feasts and Festivals in Human Society 366

S. M. Michael

5. Festivals as the Mythical Language of Self-Transformative History ..377

Ignatius Jesudasan

6. Religious and Social Dimensions of Hindu Festivals 385

P. L. Santhakumari

Book Reviews 394

Editorial

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

Along with millions of people coming from different parts of Karnataka in India, I participated in the zenith-celebration of the nine-days long Dussehra in Mysore this year. It was an enriching experience as this celebration brought together factual history and mythical history in such a vivid and colourful celebration of the festival of Dussehra. What was more striking in this emotional participation of so many people, without the distinction of caste, colour, and even creed (as many religious festivals turn out to be more and more social, and, hence, less sectarian in participation), is the fact that it creates, induces, maintains and sustains a community consciousness, a consciousness shared by all that they do form one integral community, and, thus, opening up a common platform to eliminate all divergences, positively fostering unity at all levels.

Celebration of feasts and festivals is an integral dimension of every religion. Religion being an instrument as well as the locus of 'binding' and uniting people of different strata of society, it has to necessarily employ different means to effectively bring about sustainable bonds and enduring communion among its followers. One of the effective means that the leaders as well as the followers of all religions employ and practise for this purpose is the celebration of festivals, although it should be borne in mind that all festivals are not necessarily religious in nature.

Sustainable bonds and enduring communion constitute the characteristic mark of any living and healthy community. Although communities evolve naturally and spontaneously, those bonds that sustain the communion among the members cannot be nurtured and maintained automatically or effortlessly. The vitality of any community depends on the conscious and wholehearted participation of the majority of its members in all those activities that would cater to its multi-faceted interests and needs. Apart from the day-to-day affairs, such a community requires special occasions and events, marking the commemoration of the past events, inspiration of the present moments, and expectation of the future dimensions possible and meaningful. Celebration of feasts and festivals, thus, has been an essential ingredient in fostering the bonds that unite the members of a community by spontaneously as well with conscious efforts provoking and encouraging the spirit of communion.

This communion is not to be limited to the members of any particular religious group. In the context of a fast-growing global economy, the prevailing attitudinal changes and social practices, migration of people from one place to another is an existential phenomenon. One of the results of this is the fact that none remains isolated, and everybody begins to recognize the value of plurality, not a plurality from which people keep away, but one within which everyone wants to participate and to get enriched. Most of these people who are on the move belong to one or another religion, although they may not be able to practise their religious observances as a group, both due to the lack of enough members and the needed infrastructure. However, apart from practising the rituals of their own religion and celebrating the festivals of their original community, they, too, feel the need to participate in the rituals and festivities of the community to which they belong now (due to the change of location), so that they can emotionally participate and share in the cultural and religious dynamics of the new community within which they have to realize their new identity. Facilitating this basically requires openness on the part of all. If people are able (and enabled) to respond positively, then it becomes an effective catalyst in transforming the society to enrich itself by the cultural and religious values of each other. This is not a call to dilute and dismiss anyone's (especially, of the minority in any particular spatial sphere) religion or culture, or any part thereof, if they are found to be meaningful and beneficial in uplifting our human nature to anything sublime, but an earnest call to be open towards everything best that humanity can offer from any corner. It is only in a continuous process of "give and take" that any person or group can grow in a holistic manner. In fact, this is facilitated by the observance of religious festivals.

Amidst the demanding but, sometimes unexciting daily chorus of religious as well as social practices people need certain special occasions to inspire and recharge them. This is said to be one of the functions of observing religious festivals. These may be considered as heightening moments in religious life, as they provide the necessary ingredients to lead basic human religious sentiments and emotions to the higher planes within which special and meaningful rituals and other social observances – carried out by the individuals as well as by the community as a whole – make everyone participate in a rich and lasting religious experience, thus, making room for further willing and enthusiastic engagement in the ensuing everyday-observances with proper orientation and gaiety.

The heightening of religious consciousness during the festival times may respond, at least, in two different ways. First, an open religious community will respond positively in such a situation, transforming itself as the locus of integration and harmony. Some other groups, however, may turn out to be fundamentalist in nature, and, hence, will be closed to any outside influence; they would prefer seclusion and perpetuate exclusiveness and fanaticism, thus, barring any integration and harmony with the members of other religious or social groups. Such would not even bother themselves when one member slays a person for participating in a religious worship or festivity merely because he or she belonged to another group or a caste that is lower in religious and social status; though not very frequent, there are certain cases where they would sometimes directly or indirectly encourage such practices. The need of the hour is a healthy religious perspective that should accompany any religious festivity; for, it tends to be more and more holistic in nature. That is, religion being the instrument of uniting the populace, all religious practices, including feasts and festivals can have any meaning only when they become instruments of integration and harmony, both within the particular religious group and among various religions and religious denominations. If they tend to cater animosity, instead of integration and harmony, among the people, then they cannot in any way be considered as religious at all.

Another unhealthy and dangerous tendency which is found prevalent these days is the politicisation of religious festivals. The present situation in India is a typical example. The boom of political parties all over the country, with national as well as regional or partisan interests, necessitates the employment of certain strategies to woo the electorate. Politicians read and manoeuvre the psyche of the electorate, and employ the most suitable methods to make the electorate dance to their tunes. For, they have realized that the religious sentiment of the people is the most effective tool available to them to swing the electorate to their advantage. They, therefore, plunge wholeheartedly to promote religious festivities, not with any motive to boost the religious experience of the people or the cause of national integration, but to cater to the sectarian interests of each and every particular religious group, and, thus, to provoke animosity among members of various religious groups. Such hidden agendas on their part adversely affect the building up of any sense of community among diverse interest groups. Ultimately, then, some of the pompous religious celebrations and festivities turn out to be occasions for religious as well as national disintegration: this, however, shall not be permitted.

Apart from the public proclamation of the fundamentals of religion and the unity of a particular community that is involved in the external paraphernalia's of festivals, they should become instruments of internal transformation which is vital as far as any religion is concerned. For, festivals are important as the kernel of such a religious celebration is capable of leading devotees to a periodic existential transformation, which would make the dynamics of that religion more vibrant, and religious life more attractive and meaningful to its own members. It is from this perspective V. F. Vineeth, in the first article of this number, tries to capture the convergent as well as the divergent factors involved in religious festivals. His attempt to bring together the temporal and the eternal, the particular and the universal, faith and fidelity, cult and culture, myth, mystery and history, reflects the powerful dynamics involved in any celebration of religious festivals. His conclusions that "The joy of such a celebration should be internal as well as external, bringing God's peace and harmony to the humans and to the entire universe," and that "Festival is a joyful expression of the human acceptance of divine rhythm in our lives and in our universe" speak out the holistic vision that emerges out of the divergent factors converging within the occurrences and horizons of festivity.

Paulachan Kochappilly makes an exploration to expose the beauty of the feast of Epiphany celebrated among the St. Thomas Christians in India. Calling for the preservation and practice of regional forms of the feast of Epiphany, Kochappilly contends that "the Christian baptism, which is ... commemorated and celebrated during the feast of *denha*, considers the symbolisms of water and light as essential for the baptismal ceremony." In another article, "Festivals, Communication and Development," J. B. Jeyaraj engages in an analysis of the feasts of the ancient Israelite community, and points out that any such celebration is an occasion for generations to "remember the past history and the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises to their ancestors. It is theologised as the feast of Yahweh since Yahweh has acted in the history of their salvation." Moreover, he holds that "Festivals can contribute for the development of communities if they are planned, taught to the participants and celebrated meaningfully."

Attempting to understand the meaning and significance of festivals, S. M. Michael, holds that "feasts and festivals are related to the experiential dimensions of life," and that they can "be considered as rites of intensification, whereby the values and solidarity of the society are enhanced." In the context of India, Michael suggests that festivals have to be occasions for dialogue and mutual understanding among those religions, which accept and celebrate festivals with different dynamics, so that they can facilitate the incorporation of "whatever is good and noble in cultures, which will give and enhance life, a life in abundance." Delving deep into the inner recesses of the dynamics of religious observances associated with festivals, Ignatius Jesudasan convincingly interprets festivals as the mythical language of self-transformative history shared by its members. P. L. Shantakumari, a practising Hindu by faith and a scholar in Indian religions, unveils the rich and varied sense and dynamics of some Hindu festivals, and holds that their celebration "naturally paves the way for social unity, tolerance, harmony and peace."

During this festival season in India, through this collection of articles on religious festivals, contributed by authors belonging to various backgrounds, interest groups and religious communities, *Journal of Dharma* hopes to understand and articulate the dynamics of every related aspect, especially the religious and social dimensions of festivals. Keeping track with the religious perspective, it has to be insisted that celebration of festivals in any religion and culture has to be constructive and transformative of the personal as well as the societal levels of human life led by the followers of all religions. A religious festival, in order to be considered as religious, has to evoke a sense of community among the participants. Festivity is not merely for the sake of gaiety, but for transforming any partisan sentiments into a consciousness of universality and community, whereby the particular shall not lose its identity, but enrich itself by participating in the universal, and make the universal more vibrant and attractive, thus, paving the way for an understanding into the mythical and historical past, a bright, vibrant and meaningful present, and a hopeful and optimistic future for the whole humanity.

Saju Chackalackal
Chief Editor, JD

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 306-322

RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

CONVERGENT AND DIVERGENT FACTORS

V. F. Vineeth[◆]

1. Introduction

From the very ancient days the humans look up to heaven to fix up the dates of religious festivals. The human beings have a cosmic nature. To their cosmos belong all the planets, the earth on which they live, the space, the air, the trees and, finally, all the planets in the sky. But one planet was considered special as far as the time of religious festivals was concerned. This was the moon, the lovely daughter of heaven. The psalmist says: "Thou has made the moon to mark the seasons of festivals" (Psalm 104:19). The moon with her waning and waxing dynamics invited mankind to count time, fix up dates, months and, finally, dates for festivals. In India and Israel almost all religious festivals are fixed up based on the lunar movement.

The cosmic and the divine meet in the human individual. "Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen 2:7). What came from the earth belongs to the earth; hence, the human being is very much earth-bound. But what came from heaven is divine. As a unit arising from the union of the cosmic and the divine the earthly and the heavenly, body and soul, the human being has the tremendous potential to bring down heaven to the earth and, in the same way, to raise up the earth to the world of the divine, the far transcendent world where God dwells. Certain highlighted moments of this union are deemed to be very central and have been remembered in a special way. On these auspicious

---

[◆] **Prof. V. F. Vineeth**, a long time professor of philosophy and comparative religion at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, and an author well-known for his penetrating and insightful works in Indian Christian spirituality, is the founder-director of Vidyavanam Ashram, Bangalore, an Indian-Christian initiative of blending search, research and realization, giving room for the philosophical and theological, secular and religious, knowledge of scientific advancements and the silence of the woods, academic research and spiritual *sadhana*.

occasions the heavenly and earthly meet in a more intense manner and invite the humans to participate in this union of the cosmic and the divine. Thus, we get a festival day or a season of festive celebrations. These are called religious days of festivals, because what is remembered is an event or an effect of a salvation history, in which the divine and the human have met and this meeting has become part and parcel of our religious memory.

2. The Temporal and the Eternal in Religious Festivals

The human beings live in time and are bound by time. Temporality is an inner dimension of his self-realization on earth. Time somehow domesticates him into each mode of being, namely into a becoming process. All his decisions are made in time and executed in the 'duration' of what we call time. Time is a becoming process. To be temporal means to be part and parcel of this becoming process. Temporality, that is, to be in time, is a predicament of all embodied beings. This predicament means that an embodied being is in a process of continued struggle, realizing at the expense of its own time-bound energy, which in return means that this particular being is moving to its own death or disintegration day by day. Among all embodied beings, the human being alone looks at this phenomenon with a will to transcend the above-mentioned predicamental situation. This is because among all the embodied beings, in the human being along there is a heaven-bound consciousness, well preserved in the fragile framework of the body. By the power of this consciousness the human being tries to overcome 'death', that is, to attain the victory of the 'temporal' over its own being. This taste for transcendence over the human and the temporal is best expressed at the time of religious festivals. Recalling to mind the sacred events that took place in a "mythical time" or in recent history, as in Christianity, the humans make a bridge from the temporal to the eternal, from this predicament of mortality to the bliss of immortality. Time and eternity meet in the memorial of events celebrated.

Memory is a thing of the past. But it is not just a past event. This will be history. But in memory a historical event is brought to the present life of the people with a view that they be transformed in the light of that event. "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19). When Jesus said this he was not asking us just to go back to a historical event as if to teach us history. Rather he was asking us to remember a historical fact that may inspire us, enliven us anew and lay the foundation for a new life in the future. Here past and future merge in the present moment of history and become a powerful auspicious moment filling us with the inspiring meaning of the past, awakening us for a sacrificial life for others in the model of Jesus' self-sacrificing death on the cross. The human being is temporal by nature but time is not just three phases in our history, but deep down is a moment of our historical existence into which is woven our whole past and future. In this sense every moment is *ec-static*, standing out of the present moment, though totally held in the present, in its orientation to the past and the future. In this sense the festal celebration is a remembrance, a memorial, but not a remembrance of something like a lifeless mathematical formula, but the memorial of an inspiring event which inspires me here and now, challenges me and accompanies me in such a way that my future life becomes completely surrendered to and transformed by that event. "*Tat arpitham akhila acharata*" ("surrendered to that is the entire life-style of a devotee"), says the *Bhakti-sutra*, an ancient classical work on *Bhakti*. The devotee of the Lord remembers the life of the Lord. Every step or event is lovingly remembered. This loving and living memory becomes an eternal source of inspiration. Remembrance becomes a continued meditation. "What you meditate that you become," is an ancient Indian dictum. Remembrance is, therefore, a living memory, by which one slowly gets transformed into what is remembered. "Do this in memory of me" has this type of a memorial command. It is a living memory as a springboard for a process of one's own self-transformation. St. Luke summarizes Mary's story about the birth of her baby: "But Mary kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). Mary lived in meditative remembrance of events taking place in front of her or in her. They were great salutary events in human history. We also do the same, but in order to do this our memory goes to the past, re-awaken them into the present, get inspired by them here and now and in the light of which project our life for the future. "Memory of the future" is a contradiction in terms, but it makes some sense, if we look at the memory of the past with its potential power of change within us. This is the change of self-transformation in the process of our divinisation. This is the goal to which our life is targeted. It is the meeting of my beloved Lord in heaven and of my desire to be transformed into him. We look forward to this happening with great hope. Hope is, thus, "a memory of the future," a remembrance of the past promises of the Lord, the realization of which is undoubtedly accepted and expectantly looked forward to. Religious festivals are the most auspicious moments in which our memory gets identified with our hope.

3. The Particular and the Universal in Religious Festivals

Religious festivals are always celebrated in time as a distinguished moment of our lifespan. But it is also celebrated in a particular place, made holy by a living tradition of the people around that place. We call it a sacred place, just like we call the time of the festival a sacred time. Though the humans can pray to God at any place raising their hearts to God from any part of the world, people all over the world have developed a great tendency to earmark a particular place, common to all the members of the community, as a sacred place. People come there to pray, to offer sacrifice. This can be a big church, a small chapel, a tiny space around a tree or a stone, considered to be very central to the community. The ancient people of the world always thought that this sacred place is the centre of the world, the *axis mundi*. It was the assertion of the religious mind that this particular space, however small it is, virtually contained the universal for which the human soul yearns. This principle is basically accepted also in Christian tradition, which maintains that every particular church that can be culturally and administratively different from the other, thus, contains the universal church within itself. It is in this sacred place sacrifices are offered to God, which are said to be the navel of the universe. "This sacrifice is the navel of the universe: *ayam yajno bhavanasya nabhi*" (Rgveda I.164.35).

In a true religious celebration the boundary line between the particular and the universal vanishes. Just like time and eternity meet, so also in certain 'places' the particular and the universal meet and that is why the festivals are celebrated at that particular spot. In common parlance, a place becomes sacred by the touch of a person who lived there, or a divine apparition took place there. Many mountains or rivers are said to be sacred because of the stories or events attributed to those places. Thus, Kailas, where the Lord Shiva dwells, Shabarimala, where the Lord Ayyappan, an *avatara* of Shiva dwells, Sangham in Allahabad where the confluence (*sangham*) of three holy rivers (Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswathi) take place. Several other places where deities of gods or goddess are installed or sacred persons lived are considered holy in Hindu religious tradition. Festivals will be celebrated in all these places referring to the events that took place there or stories remembered in association with those places, and the long and varied traditions people have inherited. The inner core of the sacredness attributed to any place is the fact that the universal or he who is beyond space and time has touched it and made it sacred, either directly or through the medium of some other agency.

The human dynamics of selecting sacred place and time can be seen in Christian traditions, too. Thus Christians consider Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Mount Calvary, and Tabor sacred, because of the physical touch of Lord Jesus on these places. Lourdes, Fatima and many other shrines dedicated to Mary have come out as specially acknowledged places of sacredness and celebrity, because of Mother Mary's apparition on that particular spot or because of a living tradition of some favours received from her. This is quite natural to human beings, because time and space are two basic dimensions of all embodied human beings. Sacred time and sacred space acknowledge to these dimensions while taking our body dimension to the inner content of the festivals celebrated.

4. Faith and Fidelity in Religious Festivals

All these external celebrations based on time and space do not make any sense without a corresponding internal content. This internal content, which is divine love on which the remembrance is based, is provided by faith. It is the believer who comes to celebrate the religious festival. Religious festival is not like a national festival. For example, Indians celebrate the day of Indian Independence on August 15. Even though there is the history of a long struggle for independence demanding a lot of sacrifice and even martyrdom of so many of Indian citizens, a national festival is not a religious festival in the strict sense of the word. This is because what is being celebrated is something understandable and attainable by reason and human effort. But August 15th is also a religious feast day for the Catholics all over the world. On this day is remembered the Assumption of our Lady into heaven. The celebration of this feast is not possible without Christian faith. The inner content of this festal celebration is the fact of faith that Mary, the Mother of Jesus, born immaculate, was assumed to heaven at the end of the earthly span of her life. Catholics all over the world accept this in Christian faith. A body that has not been tarnished by sin, or was singularly exempted from the all-pervading grip of the original sin, need not be subjected to the general process of disintegration; instead, it could be directly transformed into the glorious body of resurrection and assumed into heaven or into its final destination of being with God, whatever way we conceive it. The entire dogmatic teaching of assumption depends on our faith in Jesus Christ, his salvific mystery, and Mary's unique and irreplaceable relation to Christ. The history of Jesus is very central to Christian faith. Many Christian festivals, covering the entire year of the liturgical cycle, are centred on what happened to Jesus and to the people intimately related to him. The entire system of festivals or the whole liturgical cycle is accepted in faith, a fitting response to the transcendent God who reveals himself to us in time and space.

Faith is a new way of seeing things through our inner eye, which is in effect the eye of the Holy Spirit, a parting gift of Jesus to all his disciples who are ready to deny themselves and follow his footprints. Just as an inner vision, faith is also an inner listening to the Word of God, uttered in silence, powerfully inviting the believer to a new awakening from within. To this newly awakened consciousness, which is a participation in the consciousness of Christ, as far as Christian faith is concerned, a firm decision of self-surrender is added. What is seen by the eye of faith is always accepted. Hence, faith is both seeing and surrendering at the same time. Jesus loved faith very much. This is because it is not like human knowledge, a logical or mathematical formula to which one may give one's consent or not. Faith on the contrary is always seeing and opting at the same time. Simple, unsophisticated, religious faith is very powerful. It is a tremendous source of spiritual power, enlightenment, enthusiasm and readiness for any sacrifice. It is faith that makes a festal celebration joyous, even if what is celebrated is a sacrifice. It is through sacrifice Jesus saved humanity, conquered death and brought the life eternal. Faith makes celebration joyful because it is not only the remembrance of sacrifice but also a hopeful memory of the effect of sacrifice in our lives. Faith and hope embrace each other in all joyful celebrations.

The dynamics of faith are deeply rooted in our human nature and are valid for all religions. Faith is the inner response to the Ineffable and the Invisible opening up in our hearts with an intense drive to be united with what is, thus, perceived and experienced. Hope or confidence in the one who is revealed becomes an inalienable associate of any true faith. It is the content of faith that differs, though in general they all have much in common as one's inner quest for the Absolute and the acceptance of revelation which is a source of knowledge beyond the dynamics of human reason.

Thus, we have lot of festivals in Hinduism, which normally refer to the story of an *avatara* (decent of God) to the world in order to restore order and obliterate disorder in this world. The *Bhagavad Gita* puts it as follows:

> Whenever, O descendent of Bharatha, there is decline of *Dharma*, and rise of *Adharma*, then, I body Myself forth. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of *Dharma* I come into being in every age (*BG* 4.7-8).

Accordingly stories differ. The remembrance of the triumph of the good over the evil, and the consequent liberation of good people from the iron grip of the evil power structure (king or demon) are celebrated in feasts and festivals. Thus, many of these festivals (e.g., Dussehra, Deepavali, Holy) have liberation stories behind them and do have some striking similarities with the festival of the *pasch*, which is also in essence a liberation story. But when Jesus celebrated the *pasch* he turned the liberation method upside down. Instead of killing the giant or evil king, Jesus opted to die for his people and liberate them from the threat of evil, not killing the person involved, but eradicating evil from the human hearts. In fact, this is the real liberation. True liberation is not the change of the role-play of the people, namely the oppressors becoming the oppressed and the oppressed, in turn, the oppressors. Something like this happened in the Bolshevik revolution in Russia; but in the long run it proved that it was not a right path to true and lasting liberation. In these kinds of revolutions always certain neglected values will be brought to light. This will be the attractive element for the masses. But since the whole movement is not based on genuine, selfless love, the human (actually animal) passion of aggressiveness and hatred will rule these revolutionary ventures, and as a result many will be indiscriminately massacred. The dignity of the human person will be trodden under feet and a lasting peace or a welfare state will not be evolved or established. Jesus, on the other hand, inaugurated a spiritual revolution in which he himself offered to be sacrificed.

Through self-sacrifice is liberation obtained. All are invited to sacrifice their egos, the puffed up 'I' that demands all for itself. Instead, we are invited to look at the other with love and affection, as a member of our own human body, as an inalienable part of a complete wholeness. Such an attitude marks the happy dawn of a new society and that is what we celebrate in the paschal sacrifice. The idea is that a God-centred world is in the offing and we accelerate it by sacrificing our self-centredness. Indeed, it is something worth celebrating!

Before installing a deity in the temple or before inaugurating a movement or institution, a ritual (*puja*) is performed before a temple or a consecrated statue, and as a sacred ritual a coconut is broken into pieces and distributed to the people present there. By doing this, the performer, who can be a priest or a minister of the state or of the nation, proclaims that my or our self-centred world is destroyed or wilfully broken into pieces. From that day onwards we have a new God-centred world. Naturally, we have a good reason for a joyous celebration, though it involves a good spirit of self-sacrifice.

"This sacrifice is the navel of the universe," says the *Rgveda* (I.164.35). In the Vedic times the sacrifice was understood as the sacrifice of an animal to expiate the sins of the world. But here what is more important is the representative value of the animal. The animal sacrificed represents each one of us. Hence, when Jesus came, representing all of us, he said: "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in memory of me" (Lk 24:19). The eucharistic sacrifice is a memorial of what Jesus did; but at the same time it is also an invitation to place each one of us on the altar of sacrifice for the sake of others, for the sake of creating a more humane world, a more divine world for us to live in, now here on this earth. The origin of this new world order, centred on our self-sacrifice, and ultimately centred on the royal sacrifice of Jesus, we celebrate joyfully. All other religions, too, do celebrate the festivals of liberation. It is a right thing to be celebrated as a memorial of the victory of the good over the evil. But the idea of self-sacrifice for creating a better world for us to live in should be emphasized in all celebrations. Otherwise, it may become an empty celebration of our own ego-centeredness and aspired triumphalism.

Fidelity is the constant companion of faith. Faith and fidelity go hand in hand. Faith is an enlightened vision and surrender of oneself to what is seen and experienced, fidelity is the unswerving commitment for the perpetuation of this state of mind. Thus, fidelity is one's own adherence to the faith one has embraced. True fidelity should be safeguarded against the onslaught of fanaticism, on the one hand, and reckless liberalism, on the other. When fidelity is pinned down to some of the minute details of living one's religion in a particular faith, which do not belong to the essence of that very faith, but are only variables in the process of realizing one's faith in time and space, fidelity turns out to be fanatic or fundamentalistic. This, certainly, is a distorted understanding of religion and faith. In the name of fidelity to the details of religious practices one should not abandon the greater principles of religion such as love, justice and truthfulness, which constitute the claim of Being or Reality over all of us. God is the absolute reality who alone has absolute claim over us. Whatever we think about God is not necessarily the real God who is certainly beyond our comprehension. Fundamentalists tend to think that what they think alone is the real truth of religion and, thus, criticize all others from their (limited) perspective. In one and the same religion several schools of theology and spiritual disciplines are welcome and is an acceptable tradition in the most of the great religions. However, all religions have a fundamental core experience of their own and a faithful religious follower keeps up this inner core of religion dear and near to his/her heart and lives accordingly. Such a life needs fidelity to one's own faith commitment. Hence, though true fidelity will try to avoid fundamentalism or fanaticism, such a person will equally avoid the other extreme of "a religion of permissiveness," namely an attitude that any religion is okay for me.

Religion is certainly a very personal and intimate option and is very fundamental to the one who opts. Hence, we have to respect this true option of a person for his or her religion. This means that I remain faithful to my own religion, which alone makes my in-depth celebration of a festival meaningful to me. If at all I choose another religion, it is again the result of a long search and very personal and responsible decision for my ultimate concern which is centred on my relationships to my God and my people. Fidelity is, therefore, always personal, intimate and grows in depth and greater interiority, and ever remains creative, overcoming the challenges and temptations arising from the fleeting values of the world and its concerns.

5. Cults and Culture in Religious Festivals

The English literature has three words strikingly inter-related in etymology and meaning. The Latin word *cultus* means "religious worship" and the English world 'cult' is supposed to be originated from this Latin word. In the ancient world cult and culture were very much inter-related than in our modern times. Great cultures of the world arose in the cool shade of religions. They both shared a lot of insights, expressions of worship patterns, religious music, dances and ceremonies. Festivals were the great occasions for such religio-cultural celebrations. Hence, there is importance for the question of cult and culture in religious festivals.

Faith is the inner core around which a cult is developed. Faith is, thus, the nucleus of any cult. In ancient days they were called "mystery cults." Mystery and cults get their great arena of celebration during the period earmarked for religious festivals. A cult may be performed in private, or in a smaller community as the expression of an individual's or community's faith. Even in that level the culture of the cult-performance plays a great role. This is because without a certain form of culture a human being cannot perform any action. Faith gives the content for a cult, but culture supplies its form. In a religious festival cult and culture embrace each other so intimately that in reality we find them always united and as one. This does not however mean that a religious cult can be performed only in one cultural form. In that case we will be identifying the inner core of cult with its cultural form. If faith is the internal content (internal form) of the cult, culture is the external form. If we identify the internal and the external forms, then we are destroying both cult and culture. Culture is very much restricted to several factors pertaining to time and space. Particular language, particular art form, particular place or milieu in which a cult finds its expression, is an example. If we insist that the cult which is essentially a memorial of mystery of faith can be celebrated only in this one particular pattern, then we are imposing undue restrictions on the inner content of faith, which is by nature transcendent as a memorial of a liberation story, and according to the genuineness of this mystery, every one on earth has a right to participate in it. If the content of the story or event is brought to another country and culture, naturally the cult will be celebrated in the culture of the place, to which belong its own language, music, dance and all other expressions of art and articulations.

Cultural variety of the same cultic content is something to be appreciated and encouraged in all religions in the world.

As we have already seen, most of the mystery cults were memorials of certain liberation stories. Festival of mystery cult was often remembrance of elaborate and creative mythical stories colourfully presented to the people as musicals, processions or even dance-dramas lasting for several days. When Christ came into history and celebrated the paschal mystery in Jewish culture, he opened this cultic context to various cultural forms in the world. He defined the content of the cult saying "Whenever you gather together you do this in memory of me" (*Christian Missal*). But he obviously did not wish it to remain ever restricted to his own Jewish cultural form. Christianity has taken the content from this great commandment of Jesus and has celebrated the paschal mystery all over the world, preferably adapting to the cultural rhythm of the place, but ever remaining faithful to the original celebration, the sacrifice of Christ for the world and our participation in this great cosmic sacrifice. Jesus also brought about certain important changes in the meaning of the celebration. It is no more just the memory of the liberation of the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians (which is not totally excluded, though), but much more is the memory of the liberation of humanity from the strings of sinfulness and death through the self-sacrificing death of Jesus on the cross, which took place the very next day. "Do this in memory of me." The priest, the one who offers the sacrifice along with the community of the people with him, is asked to follow the example of Jesus' sacrificial death, which is being remembered and celebrated. It effectively means that, according to the mind of Jesus, all have to identify themselves with Jesus as the priest and, at the same time, as the victim of the sacrifice. A more human and a more sacred world is brought about on this earth not only by the sacrifice of Jesus, but also by our self-sacrifice along with the sacrifice of the high priest Jesus. Therefore, St. Paul says: "I rejoice in my suffering…" (Col 1:24).

Cult is culture-bound. Faith is primarily an internal experience and cult is its spiritual articulation and culture helps to express its due rhythm and harmony. We have to cultivate a taste for cult and culture. The word 'cultivate' stems from the root 'cult' (*cultus*) and is to be understood as catering, taking care of, preserving and developing one's own culture and cultic life. We usually use the word cultivation as related to the field. We have to cultivate the paddy field or the earth that it may yield flowers and fruits. The eating and gardening habits, all belong to one's culture. We have to cultivate good taste for religious values, virtues which are flowers and fruits of the soul. "I will write my law on the walls of your heart" says the Lord (Jer 31:31). To culture belong not only the choicest plates and plants of the earth, but also the good manners and traditions people cultivate and preserve in their culture.

Religious festivals are the auspicious moments in which people's culture as well as their cultural values gets exultant and exuberant expressions. They should not be secularised to the extent of eclipsing the religious values and virtues arising from the spirit and its language of faith. A culture of globalisation brings in all alien forms of eateries and drinks to the market over the holy premises of the temples and churches. The festal celebration should not be an occasion to sell out all our cultural traditions, including that of eating habits, to the profit oriented alien markets. This is a wrong tendency of a misplaced jubilation, now plaguing the time-honoured cultural habitat of various countries.

6. Myths, Mystery and History in Religious Festivals

We have already spoken about myth and mystery cults. But this was from the perspective of faith, because most of the religious festivals are centred on a mythical story of liberation. We have to see how myth or history becomes the centre of a religious festival. As we have already seen, religious festivals are centred on faith. Faith is centred on the human exigency to come in touch with the Absolute who is beyond all comprehension, as directly as possible. One way of doing this is by bringing down God to the earth by a very powerful and creative imagination, giving to God some forms, human or nonhuman, and making him part and parcel of human history. These stories played a great role in shaping the religious mind of the people and in course of time received venerable space and status in the hearts of the people concerned. Such ancient, powerful and influential religious stories of God's intervention in the world came to be known as myths. Myths, however, should not be understood as fairy tales or any novel or short story we see in the bookshops or in magazines. Myths confront the mystery of the human encounter with God. They try to answer many unanswered questions, not through the clear dialectics of logic, which is not totally excluded, but through the spontaneity of creative imagination into which are weaved philosophical thinking, poetic intuition, musical flow and the search for the meaning of the realities of life.

Myths try to answer the question: "Why are their beings and not nothing." In our days, a great philosopher, Martin Heidegger, renewed our interest in this question by an analysis of human dynamics of thinking and poetising. Myths have tried to answer these questions from time immemorial in their own way of story telling, in which they brought gods and humans to the one platform of great dramatic scenes. Thus, we have the story of the Golden Egg from which the world originated, or of the sacrifice of the great *Purusha* from whom arose our universe and all in it, including the castes of humans, herds of animals, shawls of fishes in the waters and all other cosmic globes and galaxies. One single poem has answered all our questions. It is wonderful in the sense that it is a human attempt to ponder over the mystery of the origin of the things. They are not to be understood literally, to the word meaning of the text, but as a great vision delving deep into the mysteries of nature, human existence and above all the ultimate source of what is.

Creation myths are remembered and celebrated in many religious festivals as part of the grand celebration for many days. For example, the erection of the pole for flag (*kodimaram*) before the festivals as well as before setting up a stage for presenting the salvation story in a dance-drama, is meant to represent the *axis mundi*, around which our earth rotates. Myths have always tried to explore the unexplored grounds of the mystery, which the humans have confronted with from the very beginning and are remembered specially during the festival seasons.

In most of the religious festivals, God's intervention in the act of liberation or salvation of humanity is accepted, articulated in prose and poetry and is celebrated in colourful forms. Thus, we have the great Hindu festivals of *Dussehra*, the deliverance of the people of Mysore from the wicked reign of Mahishasura, the giant king, through the intervention of divine power, who comes down in the form of a many-handed goddess, the beautiful and powerful Durga. In the same way there are other liberation stories, joyfully remembered during the festival of Deepavali, the festival of lights, or of Holy, the festival of colours, etc. Onam and Pongal, two festivals celebrated in the South India, strike a different note. Both of them are harvest festivals. Pongal, widely celebrated in Tamil Nadu, is a festival of prosperity and points to the upward surge and the abundant overflow of the boiling rice, a symbol of prosperity and welfare. Onam, the festival of Kerala, on the other hand, reminds us of the royal visit of a beloved king Mahabali whose benign reign, real or mythical, the people of Kerala remember lovingly. Though they are originally harvest festivals, we find some mythical stories attached to them. This may be a later development and points to the human exigency to bring heaven down to earth during the time of celebration.

Historicity of the story is not a seriously discussed issue in these festivals. Story, even if it is not historical, has a symbolic value. In this way myths greatly differ from fairy tales and impregnate great religious values in the minds of the believers. For Meerabhai, Lord Krishna is 'real'. She cannot think that he is only a figment of mind and, therefore, to be discarded. Krishna is a living symbol through which God has communicated to her throughout her life. The symbol, contained in the story, certainly has a history and is all the more made sacred by the devotion and celebration of a believing community for several centuries.

Inspiring religious myths are to be seen from this perspective and are to be treated with respect even by followers of other religions or secular ideologists. This is only an act of acceptance of my brother or sister with whom I make my pilgrimage to the Ultimate, though I do not literally share all the details contained in their faith. How do we make a distinction between the actual history of the person mentioned in a liberation story and of the symbol that is carried over to humanity through the person in the story? As regards many religious myths a search into the actual historicity of the person mentioned may be futile, and unnecessary. But a search into the symbol presented by this person is certainly worthwhile and greatly rewarding. Through a religious symbol God is made present to us and the intensity of the presence felt depends on the intensity of the faith of the believer. Though historicity has its own excellence, we have to understand that a myth as a symbol may work very powerfully in a believing heart, rather than the claim of historicity in a non-believing member of a religion. This is what Christians, who have lost faith, have to learn from the living religions of the East. It is faith that makes a religion worth living. Faith does not search, nor does it provide scientific reasons for the historicity of Christ. The conclusion of science and reason is not a substitute for faith in any religion. Faith is a vision enlightened by the grace of God. Historicity may become part of the inner content of certain faith, for example, historicity of Christ in Christian faith or of the Buddha in Buddhist faith. In Hinduism the emphasis is more on the symbols given to us through ancient myths and mystery cults. One should carefully make the distinction between the historicity of the person in the story and of the symbolism of the person in the story. A symbol is a historical reality, too, and in that sense the story as a medium of religious transmission, has been effective for centuries and has become a working value in the heart of the believer. As we have already seen myths have tremendous power to evoke this attitude. But for all religions self-transformation must be the ultimate goal. To every celebration of religious festival, this concept of self-transformation must be added. Then, it is always worth celebrating.

7. Conclusion

The human beings are microcosms; or rather they are the microcosmic dwelling place for the divine. We come to the conclusion that the divine is in the humans because consciousness is in them. God alone is consciousness. "In the beginning was the Word" (Jn 1:1). Word represents consciousness. The *Upanishad* says: "*prajnam* Brahman" ("Brahman is consciousness"). It also says: "*ayam Atman Brahman*" ("this self is Brahman"), because there is consciousness in it. The Being, whose nature is consciousness, we call Spirit. God's Spirit comes down to us in the form of consciousness, as light and love. Because God in his love and mercy has decided to make the humans his own dwelling place, the humans have become the embodiment of divine consciousness. Because of the body, which is matter, characterized by ex-tension (tending to have parts beyond parts), the humans became subject to time and space: *subject to time*, because they are in a process, or even in an agony, of realization through the happenings in and around them. The humans are not the ever realized. They are to be realized forever; *subject to space*, because he or she possesses an extended body, which can be situated in a definite locality subject to change. The agony of realization is a becoming process in space and time, which makes this embodied consciousness really human. But because of consciousness, the story of becoming does not end there.

Consciousness, to say in human language, is a drop of divine self-awareness in the humans, as a drop of leaven in the dough, a seed in the ground. The symbols used by Jesus himself, shows that how divine consciousness in the humans is subject to growth and can become all-pervading like leaven and all-rewarding like seeds sprouting, growing, and, finally, yielding fruits.

Religious festivals are rich and ritualistic times of celebrations, in which all these human and divine dimensions are brought into exuberant expressions. It always takes place in a space, in a particular locality, declared sacred by a long-standing tradition, which acknowledges some divine encounter or an event that has taken place in that specific place. In the same way, it always takes place in a definite time, on a particular day or for a few days as in the case of a prolonged celebration with a *Navarathri* before or an octave after. The chosen date/dates is marked in the calendar as an auspicious time (*muhurta* or *kairos*) in the span of ordinary time (*samaya* or *chronos*). Thus, we began this article dealing with these two fundamental human dimensions of religious festivals.

Then we proceeded to the core of the divine dimension of the same, namely, faith, which alone gives depth and meaning to the celebration. For some people the celebration may be limited to the jarring sound of music, and that too profane songs, and colours of decorations on the housetops and roadsides. To convert a religious celebration to such a profane vanity and vandalism is not only against the spirit of the festivals we celebrate, but also is an alarming disgrace to the whole human family. If God does not see faith in human hearts, all we give to the Lord, whose image we carry around in jubilation, is pure emptiness. On the other hand, even if we have genuine faith, we need come back to our human side to give expression to our faith. This is because faith is expressed through symbols and symbols are taken from the world and human history. Anything in the world can be a symbol, because it has come from God, and, therefore, it always points to God. Symbols are the visible signs of the invisible. Jesus, time and again, makes recourse to the symbolic value of the things in this world and uses them to teach us the truth about God and our relation with him. The symbol of the vine and branches is a brilliant example for this. We treated this in the section titled "Cult and Culture."

Finally, we came to the question of myth, mystery and history. We said that there are mythical and historical events. A mythical event may have a history of several centuries. This does not make the story narrated in the mythical event historical. We also saw that a mythical event can have power to evoke faith and commitment in the believer. God can very well use a mythical event as a symbol of his power or saving grace. The story of Job narrated in the Old Testament could be an example, even if it is disputed whether this story is mythical or historical. The religious value of myth or symbol is not questioned. But if God really comes down into history as a human being, he should be born in a particular clan or tribe, in a particular family, in a particular time and place. Then only he will be hundred percent human. He must also be mortal in the sense that all human beings are mortal. The point is, therefore, whether God comes down to us through human blood or symbols. Here blood means to be born of a woman in a real human family. If a religion is based on such an event we call it historical, although every religion as such ever has a trans-historical dimension for it. It is for elevating the human beings beyond the frontiers of historicity and this-worldly timeliness religions come to the world as a helping mate to humanity. A religious festival can be centred on mythical or historical events. Celebration of a feast or festival is always a historical event taking place here and now, in place and time uniting the heavenly and the earthly, the divine and the human. The joy of such a celebration should be internal as well as external, bringing God's peace and harmony to the humans and to the entire universe. Festival is a joyful expression of the human acceptance of divine rhythm in our lives and in our universe.

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 323-339

CELEBRATION OF THE FEAST OF EPIPHANY AMONG ST. THOMAS CHRISTIANS OF INDIA

Paulachan Kochappilly◆

1. Introduction

As seasons change, so also festivals. Truly festivals bring colour and vigour in life. They envelop and envisage the values and vision of the community. This is true of every festivity, regardless of its sphere, level, and nature.

India is a land of fasts and feasts, for Indians take note of every minute change in the world and make it an occasion to celebrate. It is a land of playfulness as well as seriousness. There is gaiety and austerity. They go hand-in-hand. So also there is unity and diversity. This is the secret of the splendour and glory that India shares from time immemorial.

This article is an attempt to explore and expose the beauty of the feast of Epiphany celebrated in India. The name 'epiphany' comes from the Greek word *epiphaneia*, meaning 'appearance' or 'manifestation'. The feast of Epiphany is celebrated on January 6, which is one of the three principal and oldest festivals of Christian Church (the other two being Easter and Christmas). It is celebrated with great solemnity and piety. The celebrations vary from place to place and from church to church. This variety in the form and content of Epiphany celebrations is an added beauty to the mystery of Christian faith. Fundamentally, it is the feast of the Manifestation of Jesus Christ. In his *Hymns on Epiphany*, St. Ephraem sings the greatness of *denha*, which he considers as one of the three great feasts in the Church:

◆**Dr. Paulachan Kochappilly**, a member of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, and author of *Celebrative Ethics* (1999), holds a doctorate in moral theology from the Accademia Alfonsiana, Rome, and is currently teaching moral theology and allied subjects at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore, and Samanvaya Regional Theologate, Bhopal.

He who enriches all came down and put on poverty,
That to the poor he might divide, the hidden stores
Out of the treasure house of the water.

He who is great became small,
So that the small one may become in him great.
He is like the greatest of all, but he became smallest of all.
He became small and raised to honour all men.[1]

St. Thomas Christians of India[2] celebrate *Denha*, the feast of Epiphany, in a very fitting manner and with great cultural attire, taking into account the socio-religious-cultural components of the motherland. The appellations in the vernacular for *Denha*, namely, *pindipperunnal* and *rakkulipperunnal*, are suggestive and indicative of the ingenuity of St. Thomas Christians of India for contextual adaptability and textual fidelity.

This article has two sections. At the first instance, a general study will be made on the Celebration of the Feast of Epiphany. Then, the characteristic features of the celebration of *Denha* among the St. Thomas Christians will be presented. A brief mention of *Deepavali* in the conclusion might highlight the linkage and lineage of *Denha* against the backdrop of the cultural heritage of India.

2. Celebration of the Feast of Epiphany

The basic biblical passage for the feast of Epiphany is the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan, which sets the scene and sense of the celebration. The text reads as follows:

---

[1] Ephraem, *Hymns on Epiphany* 4: 9, 12, cited in Merja Merras, *The Origin of the Celebration of the Christian Feast of Epiphany: An Ideological, Cultural and Historical Study* (Univeristy of Joensuu Pubilications in the Humanities, No. 16), Joensuu: Joensuu University Press, 1995, 167; hereinafter referred to as *Christian Feast of Epiphany*.

[2] St. Thomas Christians trace their origin back to the preaching of the Gospel in India by St. Thomas the Apostle. They were in close collaboration and communion with East Syrian Church for many centuries. About this Christian community, it is rightly observed that it is Indian in culture, Christian in faith, and Oriental in worship. While being proud of the apostolic faith and tradition, there are at present no fewer than eight churches in this community of which two, the Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara churches, are in communion with Rome. The former follows the East-Syrian tradition in worship, the latter the West-Syrian tradition.

> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptised by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."[3]

As a preliminary reflection, it is evident from the above passage that the thrust and the content of the feast of Epiphany is the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. The Maronite liturgical prayer outlines the important features of Epiphany in Christian church, especially in the Eastern Church. Thus, the *Synaxarion* for Epiphany recounts:

> Today we celebrate the manifestation or epiphany or the Trinity at the baptism of Christ as well as the manifestation of the glory of God in the person of the Lord come into the world, that is to say, the manifestation of Christ, the Word of God, among us... Let us then call to mind the grace of God who has appeared for the salvation of all, and thank him for the baptism through which we have been begotten in the Spirit and through which we have put on Christ and become children of the Father.[4]

So at the baptism of the Lord we have not only an epiphany or manifestation of Christ as God's Son, but also a theophany of the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Again, the feast of Epiphany is not only a celebration of the baptism of Christ, but also the baptism of every Christian. Prayer for the liturgical celebration of Epiphany unveils its richness and beauty:

> Jesus,
> Light of the world,
> you were baptised in the Jordan
> and revealed to us the Father and the Spirit,
> who bore witness to you from heaven.
> Purify us through your holy descent,

---

[3] Mark 1:9-11.

[4] *The Prayer of the Faithful according to the Maronite Liturgical Year*, translated and adapted for use in the Diocese of Saint Maron, USA, from *Priere du croyant selon l'anneé liturgique maronite*, ed. Boutros Gemayel, vol. 1, *Sundays of the Church Season of Announcement & Birth of Our Lord, Season of Epiphany*, Brooklyn, New York: Diocese of Saint Maron, 1982, 662; henceforth referred to as *The Prayer of the Faithful*.

enlighten us with your true knowledge
and we will praise and glorify you,
now and for ever, Amen.[5]

The foundational motifs of the feast of Epiphany are well echoed in the above hymn, namely, the theme of light and water. Through the singing of the hymn, the event of the past is brought to the present for the appreciation of and assimilation by the assembly. It also represents the desire of the worshipping community for a greater enlightenment and a thorough purification of all the participants through the great mystery of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. The ultimate end of the baptism of Jesus and the baptism of believers finds its reverberation in the above verses: the praise and glory of God, *kabod* or *doxa* of God.

Although the baptism of Jesus occupies the central stage of the feast, there are different hypotheses concerning the beginning of the feast of Epiphany. Merja Merras, in her dissertation, argues that the feast of Epiphany as an outcome of the thought of continuing the Jewish festival of Tabernacles, one of the three principal pilgrim festivities, in Christianity. Her point of departure is the celebration of the three main feasts of Jews. Since the Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost were taken over in Christian Church with Christological and Pneumatological nuances, it is legitimate to relate the feast of Tabernacles with the feast of Epiphany. Merja argues:

> In Judaism there were three main feasts which involved the obligation of pilgrimage to the Jerusalem temple. Two of them, Passover and Pentecost, have continued in the Christian Church, though their themes have gained new aspects. The Feast of Tabernacles, which was said to be the greatest of all celebrations, seems not to have any continuation in Christianity. In the early Christian Church there were also three main feasts. According to the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, they were Passover, Pentecost and Epiphany... It is plausible that all the three ancient Jewish pilgrimage festivals gained a new Christian approach as the fulfilment of the eschatological time.[6]

---

[5] *The Prayer of the Faithful*, 668.

[6] *Christian Feast of Epiphany*, 17-18.

It is likely to think along the line of the author and to trace the connection of Epiphany with the feast of Tabernacles. In support of the argument, Merja puts forward a biblical foundation to her hypothesis:

> The Gospel of John connects the Feast of Tabernacles with Jesus' existence as the light of the world and the fountain of living water. It might reflect the way the early Jewish Christian Church celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles, which was now seen as the festival of the true descent of Yahweh's *doxa*, the appearance of the true light and the fountain of living waters.[7]

The Gospel episode in question throws light on the important symbolisms of the feast of Epiphany, namely, the symbolism of water and light. At the feast of Tabernacles, and precisely "On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"[8] Referring to the rite of illuminating the court of the women during the feast, Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."[9] It is, therefore, likely to establish a connection between the Jewish feast of Tabernacles and the Christian feast of Epiphany. Furthermore, Merja highlights two important features of the feast of Tabernacles which match with the feast of Epiphany:

> The themes of the Jewish Sukkoth were at the latest stage celebrations of God's glory descending upon the earth, the torches and palm branches symbolizing it, and the living water flowing from the centre of the earth.[10]

Apart from the biblical insight into the origin and celebration of Epiphany, there are also historical reasons which could be cited in support of the feast. At the beginning of the fourth century the Church faced a threat in Arianism, which challenged the Divine Incarnation. In light of this danger, Merja presumes that "the Church found it necessary to strengthen the celebration of the Incarnation and the baptism of believers, which is rooted in the baptism of Christ, in order to defend its existing faith. This might have been the final stage in the development of the universal Christian Epiphany feast."[11]

---

[7] *Christian Feast of Epiphany*, 60.

[8] John 7:37-38.

[9] John 8:12.

[10] *Christian Feast of Epiphany*, 60.

The Feast of Epiphany occupies a prominent place in the liturgical calendar of Christian liturgy and life. It is both a feast and a season in the Church. It is a feast, for on this day the Christians celebrate the feast of the manifestation of Lord Jesus Christ at His baptism in the river Jordan. The feast falls on January 6. It is a season, for the mystery of the Manifestation is commemorated and celebrated for a period of seven weeks, starting with the Sunday after January 6. During this season, the Syro-Malabar Church of St. Thomas Christians remembers the life-giving words and works of Lord Jesus Christ together with the commemoration of the apostles, martyrs and saints on Fridays of the season.

Regarding the historical origin and meaning of the festival, Clement of Alexandria informs us that January 6 was observed by some members of a Gnostic Sect called Basilidians as a day in honour of Our Lord's Baptism. The celebration of the feast started in the East, and by fourth century it was spread to the West. Although the original occasion for instituting this feast in the East is not known, it is thought to have been an opposition to some pagan festival which claimed to commemorate "manifestations" of a pagan god.[12]

Depending on the particular Church, the community of the faithful focused on varied events or moments of the manifestation of Lord Jesus Christ. In the East the principal manifestation recalled was that made at the Baptism of Jesus, when a voice came from heaven saying: "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." In Jerusalem, the manifestation of the Son of God at the Nativity seems to have been included in the celebration of the Epiphany. In Cyprus, the manifestation of His Divinity at the miracle of changing water into wine for the wedding feast in Cana was commemorated together with the Nativity.[13]

The Greeks call this feast by additional names like, *Theophania* (divine appearance) and the Feast of Lights. They keep the Baptism as the principal object commemorated on the Epiphany. It came to be called as the Feast of Lights "because of the lighted candles held at Baptism which was administered on this day."[14] In order to highlight the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, "it is customary for them to go to the sea or to a river where the water is blessed."[15]

---

[11] *Christian Feast of Epiphany*, 18.

[12] James L. Monks, *Great Catholic Festivals*, London & New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1958, 21; hereinafter referred to as *Great Catholic Festivals*.

[13] *Great Catholic Festivals*, 22.

Also St. Thomas Christians recall and relive the event of the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. The feast of Epiphany, for them, "is the manifestation of the Holy Trinity through the humanity of Jesus. Practically, it is the presentation of Jesus as the light and life of the world."[16]

An early account received in this regard is from the preaching of John Chrysostom at the feast of Epiphany in the year 387. It is revealing:

> For this is the day on which he was baptised and sanctified the nature of the waters. Therefore also on this solemnity in the middle of the night all who are gathered, having drawn the water, set the liquid aside in their houses and preserve it throughout the year, for today the waters are sanctified. And this evident marvel is produced, that this water is not corrupted by the long passage of time, but through an entire year or even two or three years the water drawn today remains pure and fresh, and after such a long time it rivals that just drawn from the spring.[17]

Further, in his sermon, John Chrysostom illustrates the focus of the celebration and the rituals and ceremonies involved in it. As it is obvious, it was the baptism of Jesus which was emphasised in the feast of Epiphany. His testimony to the ceremony of drawing the sanctified water is another clear indication to the centrality of the celebration, that is, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, through which Jesus sanctified water. This points to the blessing of the waters at baptism and the sacrament of baptism. Moreover, "And it is no coincidence that Epiphany both in France and Spain, and also in the East, becomes one of the occasions for baptism to be celebrated publicly. In the Byzantine rite, to this day, there is a special Blessing of the Waters at baptism which is an adaptation of the corresponding blessing of the water at Easter."[18]

---

[14] *Great Catholic Festivals*, 23.

[15] *Great Catholic Festivals*, 23.

[16] Varghese Pathikulangara, "St. Thomas Christians and Popular Devotions," *Journal of Dharma* 15,3 (July-September 1990), 266.

[17] Quoted from Michael Perham and Kenneth Stevenson, *Welcoming the Light of Christ: A Commentary on the Promise of His Glory* (*Services and Prayers for the Season from All Saints to Candlemas*), Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991, 73; hereinafter referred to as *Welcoming the Light of Christ*.

This brief but basic understanding of the feast of Epiphany takes us to the study of the specific features of the feast celebrated among St. Thomas Christians of India.

3. Celebration of *Denha*

St. Thomas Christians retain the original Syriac word, *denha,* for the feast of Epiphany. It means rising, splendour, glory, manifestation.[19] It also connotes the baptism of Christ. Hence, *denha* denotes the manifestation of Jesus Christ at his baptism in the Jordan. For them, this is one among their important feasts. St. Thomas Christians celebrate Epiphany as "*rakkuli* (night bath) in some places. On that feast day, tradition says, the Thomas Christians bathed at night in rivers or canals in memory of our Lord's baptism. In some other place for the same feast torches are lighted during the night and people cry out *el paiya* (God is bright) referring to the manifestation of our Lord."[20] The sense and significance of *denha* are beautifully painted in the night liturgy (*Lelja*) of the feast:[21]

I delight to do your will
  Filled are those mysteries, which are all, filled with glory of
    God, our Father.
  God the Son was baptised in the river Jordan by the hands of
    John Baptist.
  When the Master bowed Himself for Baptism, John said to
    Him:
  "I should justly be baptised by Your holy hands, O Lord;

---

[18] Perham and Stevenson, *Welcoming the Light of Christ*, 74.

[19] Charles Payngot, *Thirunaalukal* (Malayalam), Kottayam: Oriental Institute of Religious Studies India, 1999, 42.

[20] Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1970, 94.

[21] *Bless the Lord: The "Divine Praises" according to the East Syriac or Chaldeo-Indian Liturgical Heritage*, ed. Varghese Pathikulangara, Kottayam: Denha Services, 1996, 71-72; hereinafter referred to as *Bless the Lord*.

why should You then come to me for the sinner's baptism?"
Jesus replied: "Now we should fulfil justice, as is due."
Let us sing His praise.
Let your fountain be blessed
By the waters of baptism and the Spirit we have become immortal.
O Lord, by Your baptism all fountains of the earth are indeed made holy.
Since the lamb of atonement has undergone this baptism,
By the waters of the flood earth will not be swept again.
By the waters of baptism sinners are in truth redeemed.
He who gave us baptism as to heal the wounds of sin is the Holy One.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit
By the holy manifestation when You, O Lord, gave us sweetness of freedom,
Satan feared who through sin bound human race with debts and obligations of all.
Through baptism You give mankind the bright lamp of faith in You.
Let it, O Lord, shed its light for ever on all the earth.
As You have commanded us in Trinity's holy Name we receive Your baptism.
Lord, let Your good will rest on us always for ever.

These verses represent the biblical, theological, liturgical and spiritual import of the feast for the faithful: it is the commemoration and celebration of the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan with great details, faithful to the biblical narration; it is the recollection of the significance of Christian baptism; it is the manifestation of the most Holy Trinity; there is the mention of the role of the Trinity in Christian baptism; there is the singing of praise and thanksgiving to the blessed Trinity, so also the main motifs of light and life are celebrated. In short, *denha*, on the one hand, is the theophany of the Trinity and the manifestation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and, on the other, it is the participation of every Christian in the baptism of Christ.

To the celebration of *denha*, there are also some attractive and typical cultural, traditional and ecclesial renderings that deserve special attention. There are two festivities to solemnise and popularise the feast of *denha,* namely, *pindipperunnal* and *rakkulipperunnal*. While *pindiperunnal* is popular in the northern region of Kerala, *rakkulipperunnal* is a speciality in the southern region.

The popular celebrations of *pindipperunnal* include the erecting of a plantain trunk (*pindi*), specially decorated in the courtyard with many torches attached to it. According to the tradition, on the previous night of Epiphany celebration, the family members go round the decorated and illuminated plantain trunk, singing a Syriac hymn, *el paiya*, meaning, God is light. This hymn is addressed to Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, whose manifestation is commemorated and celebrated on the feast of *denha* or Epiphany. Needless to say that the celebration of *pindipperunnal* focuses on the theme of light, which is a constituent theme of the feast of Epiphany or *denha*. By lighting the torches fixed to the plantain trunk erected in the courtyard is a veneration of Jesus, the Sun of the world, or the Light of the world. It reminds the faithful about the declaration of Jesus on the feast of Tabernacles: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."[22] As the people go round the illuminated lamps shouting the mantra, *el paiya*, they too declare that Jesus is the Light of the world and that he enlightens their path. In Jesus Christ, the faithful behold the glory of God and, consequently, they worship him as the Sun illumining the world and their mind and heart. The theme of light suits also on another count, namely, January 6 was a solemn day for the Egyptians, as they celebrated the birth of Aion from a virgin called Kore on the same date. It is likely that the early Christians found meaning in celebrating the Nativity of Jesus Christ on the same day. The celebration of the Nativity of Jesus is held on January 6 to this day in some Orthodox Churches. Another possible ground for the festivity of light in connection with *denha* and *pindipperunnal* is the winter solstice, when the day is shortest and the sun in the 'infancy' stage. Therefore, this day is celebrated as birth of the sun, the source of light. This is an added reason for the feast of light on January 6, the feast of *denha.*

---

[22] John 8:12.

The contextualised version of the feast of *denha,* that is, *pindipperunnal* is a meaningful and successful step in evangelisation and inculturation, for it incorporates all the important factors of translation, transmission and transformation involved in the process. The Maronite hymn for the occasion is illustrative and instructive of the great significance of the feast of light on *denha:*

> The Light of the just and joy of the upright is Christ Jesus, our Lord.
> Begotten of the Father, he manifested himself to us.
> He came to rescue us from darkness and to fill us with the radiance of his light.
>
> Day is dawning upon us; the power of darkness is fading away.
> From the true Light there arises for us the Light that illumines our darkened eyes.
>
> His glory shines upon the world and enlightens the very depths of the abyss.
> Death is annihilated, night has vanished, and the gates of Sheol are broken.
>
> Creatures lying in darkness from ancient times are clothed in light.
> The dead arise from the just and sing because they have a Saviour.
>
> He brings salvation and grants us life.
> He ascends to his Father on high.
> He will return in glorious splendour and shed his light on those gazing upon him.
>
> Our King comes in majestic glory,
> Let us light our lamps and go forth to meet him.
> Let us find our joy in him, for he has found joy in us.
> He will indeed rejoice us with his marvellous light.[23]

Manifestation takes place in light, and, hence, the importance of light for the feast of *denha.* Jesus is acknowledged and adored as the Light of the world, who rescues them from darkness and fills them with the radiance of his light. The supplication of the people on the feast of light deserves special attention. It is to light our lamps so that we may go forth to meet him. It is in finding him, the true Light, that one may find joy. The hymn, "e*l paiya*," sung on the occasion is a clear indication of the fundamental Christian experience and the eschatological expectation.

---

[23] *The Prayer of the Faithful*, 670.

Rakkulipperunnal is another name for the feast of *denha* or Epiphany. As the word *rakkuli* indicates a ritual bath (either in the night or in the early morning), obviously, it is a pointer to the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. So also, the importance of water in cleansing people is recognised. According to the tradition, remembering the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, the faithful had a holy bath in rivers or lakes. This reminded them also of their baptismal consecration to the most blessed Trinity. Such a ritual bath on the feast of *denha* might have helped people to relive the experience of Jesus' baptism and their own baptism, revitalising and empowering them with genuine identity and dignity as Christians in the world. This realisation calls for greater commitment in the Church for the world.

The account of the feast of *denha* among Yakoba Church[24] of St. Thomas Christians illustrates the symbolism of water and its significance for the faithful. From this perspective, Susan Visvanathan provides an account of the feast of *denha* as follows:

> The morning prayers begin at 7 am. at *Kurisu Palli*. After the *Tubdein* (which is the prayer asking for the blessing of saints, holy men and bishops, both alive and dead) the priest and deacons, wearing celebratory vestments, carry in procession a transparent jar of water with a small wooden Cross placed at its mouth. The jar is covered with the *sosafa* which is otherwise used to keep the paten and chalice covered. Taking the Cross, the Bible and candles, the

---

[24] 'Yakoba' or 'Jacobite' Church takes its name from Jacob Baradai, the bishop of Edessa in the sixth century. It is one of the Syrian Orthodox Churches. Its liturgy is West Syrian or Antiochene. Back in India, due to the unrest and unwanted interference of the Western churches in the affairs of the St. Thomas Christians of India, there took place a split among St. Thomas Christians. As a result of the split in the community, many leaders of the community resolved to break away the relationship with Rome and continue the allegiance with the Persian Church, with which St. Thomas Christians were at home. It was the Antiochene Church, which came to their help.

priest, deacons and worshippers leave through the northern door, circle around the church once, and enter again through the southern door. Carrying the jar of water signifies the Old Testament period in which everything remained implicit and unrevealed. Hymns are sung which refer to John the Baptist, to the River Jordan and to the dove, the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. After the prayers and the blessings of the censer, the *sosafa* on the jar is lifted, the wooden Cross taken out of its mouth and the water blessed by the priest. The lifting of the *sosafa* signifies that the Old Testament period is over with the arrival of Christ the Saviour.

In the last part of the service the cross is taken to the baptismal fount and the blessed water poured over it, signifying the baptism of Jesus Christ. The priest returns to the altar with the jar and, placing it there, celebrates the Holy *Qurbana*. After the Eucharist celebration, everyone drinks a few drops of this sacred liquid, starting with the celebrant. The water left over in the jar is kept in a chest in the sanctuary, to be used when someone in the parish is ill or in trouble.[25]

This narration of *denha* underscores the baptism of Jesus Christ and points to the healing power of water. An important remembrance on *denha* is the voice of the Father concerning Jesus, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."[26] The hymn for the occasion testifies the belief of the faithful:

Today, the light of the Father appeared in the waters of the Jordan.
Heaven and earth were astounded when John poured water on your
 head.
Today the Father's voice was heard: "This is my beloved Son in
 whom I am well pleased,"
And the Holy Spirit hovered above the head of the Son in the form of
 a dove.[27]

O pure One,
Who purified us by baptism,

---

[25] Susan Visvanathan, *The Christians of Kerala: History, Belief and Ritual Among the Yakoba*, New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2001, 190-191.

[26] Mark 1:11.

[27] *The Prayer of the Faithful*, 660.

Received the incense and prayers which we offer you on the day of
your holy baptism.
Make us pure temples where the life-giving Trinity will dwell,
And we will give glory and praise to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
now and for ever.[28]

The idea of baptism and the theophany of the most Holy Trinity are adequately emphasised in the prayers of the Syro-Malabar Church of St. Thomas Christians as well. The following hymn for the feast of *denha* summarily states the effect of baptism and exhorts the congregation to take refuge in the mystery of the Trinity:

He has called us sons!
Through the baptismal water
which cleanses every stain of sin,
O Lord, there flows Your mercy;
thus we become purified.
Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit!
Baptism is given in
the name of the Trinity;
we should also take refuge
in three Persons equally.[29]

Thus, the basic themes of the feast of *denha* are the mystery of the Holy Trinity, the baptism of Jesus in the waters of the Jordan, the baptismal water of Christians, Christ the Light of the world, and the declaration of the Father. All these point to one and the same episode, namely, the baptism of Jesus in the river Jordan. During the baptism of Jesus, the mystery of the Holy Trinity is revealed; the identity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God is made public; the function of the Holy Trinity in the baptism of Christians is underlined; and the importance of water and light in the absolution and illumination of Christians is described. Another hymn for the feast of *denha* paints most of these mysteries of faith in a single note:

Eternal Light,
you enlighten all who come into this world,
as you have enlightened the angels in heaven.

---

[28] *The Prayer of the Faithful*, 660.

[29] *Bless the Lord*, 77.

You came to bring light to Adam whom you formed,
and you instituted holy baptism, the mystery of our rebirth by water
and the Spirit.
You fulfilled the words of the prophets:
Moses, to whom you gave an image of baptism through the water
and the clouds;
David, who heard your voice when he sang:
"The waters saw you, O God, and the Jordan trembled and returned
to its sources;"
Jeremiah, who saw you when he said:
"Here is a man whose name is light which is light that shone in the
darkness."
Indeed, through your manifestation and baptism, well-beloved Son,
you fulfilled all the symbols and prophecies.[30]

The celebrations of *denha* by St. Thomas Christians, namely, *rakkulipperunnal* and *pindipperunnal* are of great significance, for each of them focuses on one of the two fundamental themes of the feast of Epiphany, that is, cleansing of sins and enlightenment, characteristics of water and light, respectively. In other words, among the St. Thomas Christians water and light are considered important elements in the celebration of the feast of Epiphany, the commemoration and celebration of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Water and light are essential elements of Christian baptism as well. They point to one reality, namely, life: both earthly as well as eternal life. While *rakkulipperunnal* emphasises the element of water, *pindipperunnal* highlights the element of light.

The creative imagination and the theological insight of St. Thomas Christians into the celebration of *denha* are praiseworthy, for they have beautifully translated, transmitted and transformed the major themes and significance of the feast of Epiphany in the socio-religio-cultural settings of the faithful, that is, Indian.

4. Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, it is fitting to give a brief sketch of the feast of *Deepavali* or *diwali*, which literally means "a row of lights." It is the festival of lights, which falls on the last day of the dark half of the month *Kartika* (October-November). Generally speaking, Hindus remember the return of Lord Rama (the incarnation of Lord Vishnu in the *Treta Yuga*) with Sita, and Lakshman to his capital city Ayodhya after an exile of fourteen years. It is in honour of welcoming their enchanting and endearing king the folk light the lamps. On this day, as prescribed in the sacred scriptures, people take an oil bath in the morning and wear new clothes. This is an evidence to the ritual bath in water and its sanctifying effects that accompany the celebrations of *Deepavali*. A ritual bath is an essential ceremony for the feast of *Deepavali*. The waving of light is also portrayed as another essential element of the feast. That is to say, ritual bath and illumination are fundamental to the celebration of *Deepavali* all over India.

---

[30] *The Prayer of the Faithful*, 675.

To conclude, it is to be noted that though the story of the festivals differs radically, there is a striking commonality between the feast of *denha* and *deepavali*. As far as, the rituals of these festivities are concerned, both of them give emphasis on sanctification and enlightenment. While *rakkulipperunnal* of *denha* underscores the aspect of purification through a ritual bath, *pindipperunnal* of *denha* underlines the phase of illumination through lighted lamps.

To my mind, though *rakkulipperunnal* and *pindipperunnal* of *denha* developed in different regions in the home state of St. Thomas Christians, they are to be considered as integral parts of the same feast. Put them together, the feast of *denha* presents the full meaning. Moreover, the ritual of bath in water and the ritual of lighting the lamps are inseparably linked in the feast of Manifestation of Jesus Christ during his baptism in the river Jordan. So too the Christian baptism, which is also commemorated and celebrated during the feast of *denha*, considers the symbolisms of water and light as essential for the baptismal ceremony.

In this age of reconciliation between localisation and globalisation, care should be given to preserve, promote and popularise the almost extinct patterns of celebrating the feast of *denha,* which give a taste of the perfect blending of the text and context and a testimony to the great heritage of St. Thomas Christians of India. As a step towards the revival of the particular ecclesial adaptation in connection with the feast of Epiphany, the Church could think of linking both *rakkulipperunnal* and *pindipperunnal,* since they together paint the integral picture of the feast of *denha,* the revelation of Jesus Christ at the baptism in the river Jordan.

The special merit of St. Thomas Christian tradition, as far as the celebration of *denha* is concerned, is in highlighting the twofold notions of the feast, namely, purification (water and bath) and illumination (light and declaration) through *rakkulipperunnal* and *pindipperunnal*, respectively, both of which are rooted in the soil and culture of the land.

In the celebration of the feast of *denha* by St. Thomas Christians, there is a continuity of the feast of baptism of Jesus Christ in the water of Jordan and the manifestation of the Son of God by the Father in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The novelty of the festivity consists in embracing the socio-religious-cultural elements of the people and place, though at the same time being faithful to the biblical, theological as well as liturgical traditions of the Church.

The festivity of *deepavali* helps us to appreciate the richness and relevance of the particular features of *denha* celebrated by St. Thomas Christians, namely, *rakkulipperunnal* and *pindipperunnal*. It explains the importance of the ritual bath (purification) and lighting the lamps (illumination) for any religious festivity in India, both of which are essential facets of *denha*. This is an added reason to revive and popularise the age-old forms of *denha* celebrations found among St. Thomas Christians, which are otherwise at the verge of extinction. Such a revival of the local forms of *denha* celebration will bring colour and vigour in the life of the believers. Through an experiential remembrance of the baptism of Jesus Christ in the river Jordan and the renewal of their own baptism, the faithful will be enabled to review their identity and dignity as Christians and, thus, to radiate the glory of God.

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 340-365

FESTIVALS, COMMUNICATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj[*]

1. Introduction

Communities around the world have their own religious, political and cultural festivals and celebrate them in their own style on a particular period of time in a year. Religious communities in India whether they belong to Hinduism or Islam or Christianity or other faiths love to celebrate festivals with elaborate and expensive arrangements to make their celebrations grandeur. Some of the festivals such as Deepavali, Ramzan, Christmas are celebrated nation-wide by the respective communities with the greetings and blessings of their religious leaders, politicians of different parties and the President of India. Some other festivals such as Onam of Kerala and Pongal of Tamil Nadu are celebrated at the state level. A number of regional festivals are celebrated by the villagers or a sect or caste group or a tribe. Chithirai festival, marking the beginning of Tamil New Year is a grand festival celebrated locally for a week in the Meenakshi Temple at Madurai. National festivals such as Independence Day, Republic Day and May Day are remembered by all the communities of India, irrespective of their caste and religion. Festivals are given so much of importance in Indian society because they function as a medium of communication enabling the communities to maintain their self-identity in the midst of pluralistic culture. Festivals remind them of their religious, historical and social traditions. They strengthen the social and religious bond of the communities. Festivals make their worship more meaningful and contribute to their spirituality. Festivals of historical importance remind the participants of their historical past and motivate to shape their future. However, festivals are used sometimes to oppress a certain section of the community either a sub-caste or women or children.

---

[*] **Dr. J. B. Jeyaraj** is the Director of Research at ACTS Academy of Higher Education, Bangalore and an ordained clergy of the CSI Madurai–Ramnad Diocese, Tamil Nadu.

Festivals can be used for liberating the spirit of communities from hopelessness and exploited situation or for suppressing communities. Festivals can contribute for the development of communities if they are planned, taught to the participants and celebrated meaningfully. With the rise of fundamentalism, festivals are used today to propagate religious and political fanaticism, superstitions, oppressive customs and inhuman practices, creating tensions within a community or between communities. Celebration of festivals ends up sometimes in conflicts, violence and bloodshed.

A detailed study of festivals from different perspectives could be helpful. But my interest is to study some of the festivals of ancient Israel narrated in the Old Testament from the perspective of communication. Many studies have already been made on the festivals of Israel from historical, form-critical, development of traditions and theological perspectives using various approaches. Roland de Vaux gives a detailed narration of several festivals of the Old Testament discussing their origin and development in his book *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*.[1] H. H. Rowley discusses the development of worship from the patriarchal period to the post-exilic period and the place of festivals in Israelite worship.[2] Georg Fohrer points out the link between the festivals of Canaanites and Israelites and the way the Israelites theologised the borrowed festivals in the light of their faith in Yahwehism.[3] Mowinckel brings out the meaning and role of cult and festivals, particularly the Enthronement Festival paying attention to the *sitz-im-Leben* of the festivals and the way the Psalms contribute to the preservation and development of the festivals in Israel.[4] Arvid Kapelrud traces the relationship between worship and the development of religious traditions in Israel and the role of the cult in preserving the traditions and transmitting to the generations.[5] Norman Gottwald discusses the relationship between cult and historical traditions.[6] K. J. Kraus' study brings out background and celebrations of various festivals.[7] The Historical-Critical methods, no doubt, have contributed enormously to the study of festivals in the Old Testament, especially to know more about the origin and development of festivals, relationship between the cult and traditions, theology of the festivals in Pentateuchal sources of JEDP and the process of historicization and theologization of festivals. However, not much effort is taken to study the festivals in ancient Israel from the perspective of communication and its relevance for the development of community.

---

[1] Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, London: DLT, 1986, 475-518.

[2] H. H. Rowley, *Worship in Ancient Israel: Its Forms and Meaning*, London: SPCK, 1967, 1-143.

[3] Georg Fohrer, *History of Israelite Religion*, London: SPCK, 1981, 195-213.

[4] S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982, 1-22, 140-185.

2. Community, Cult and Communication

Scholars of different disciplines of study have proposed various definitions for the term 'community' and make distinctions between the three related concepts such as 'communities', 'community' and "sense of community." 'Communities', in general, means "groups of people who relate to each other in an interactive way, who share common goals and values and survive as groups over some period of time."[8] The ancient Israel settled in the land of Canaan is one of the communities which had goals and values, shared their resources and interacted within themselves as well as with other communities outside and faced natural calamities, attacks of enemies and persecutions in different periods of history and experienced exile and dispersion to other territories. Yet, they survived as a community and maintained a common identity as people of Israel. Scholarly studies on the nature of the composition of the people of Israel show the inclusion of different races such as Edomites, Moabites, Ammonities, Canaanites, Babylonians and Persians into the community at different stages of their history.[9] There were marriages between the Israelites and other communities living in the midst of them or in their neighbouring nations. Biblical references to the marriage of Moses to the daughter of a Priest, a Midianite (Ex 2:15-22), Boaz to Ruth, a Moabite woman (Ruth 4:13), David with Bathsheba, a Hittite woman (2Sam 11:27), Solomon with the daughters of neighbouring kings (1Kings 11:1-3), Ahab with Jezebel, the woman of Tyre (1Kings 19:1) and the reform of Ezra (Ezra 9:12-14) and Nehemiah (Neh 13:23-27) to put away the wives taken from Babylonian exile prove the inclusive nature of the Israelite community. Some of them became part and parcel of their families and others lived among the Israelites and worked as their servants. Both the nucleus and extended families of ancient Israel had people of other races, languages and cultures. The self-understanding of the community of Israel as the chosen and covenanted people of Yahweh was nurtured and sustained by the process of communication. This included various means, which may be classified as follows:

---

[5] Arvid S. Kapelrud, "Tradition and Worship: The Role of Cult in Tradition Formation and Transmission" in *Tradition and Theology in the OT*, ed. D. A. Knight, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, 101-124.

[6] N. K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh: A Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050 BCE*, New York: Orbis Books, 1981, 63-114.

[7] K. J. Kraus, *Worship in Israel*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1966.

[8] N. Jayaweera, "Communication for Community," in *Communication and Community and Prophecy*, ed. J. Massey, Delhi: ISPCK/WACC, 1989, 4-6.

i) Telling of the stories about divine revelation and promises of land, prosperity and becoming a great nation given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; their bondage, deliverance from Egypt; election and covenant to preserve the myth of their origin and occupation of the land of Canaan;

ii) Sagas and legends of leaders and their victories and making the community a great nation;

iii) Instructions of laws and ordinances as received directly from God to exist as an ethical community;

iv) Presentations about God's attributes and actions through songs, prophetic oracles, historical reports, proverbs; and

v) Theologising and offering sacrifices and celebrating festivals in the context of cult.

Through the above process of communication between God and people, leaders and congregations, members of family, the generations of the past, present and future in ancient Israel they could develop a self-identity and a culture as the community of Yahweh and maintain their identity and culture as distinctive and unique. They developed their community, in terms of their identity, structure of their society, leadership and administration, economy, military security, worship, sacrifices and festivals. The socio-political, economic and religious natures of the community were shaped by the effect of the communication taking place in the context of families, worship and court.

---

[9] J. Bright, *History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1972, 131; M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, London: SCM Press, 1983, 1-7.

Cult played a major role in communicating the ideals to the members of the community. According to Mowinckel, cult is "the socially established and regulated holy acts and words in which the encounter and communion of the Deity with the congregation is established, developed and brought to its ultimate goal. In other words: a relation in which a religion becomes a vitalizing function as a communion of God and congregation, and of the members of the congregation amongst themselves."[10] The communication of God to the community through words and acts is an initiative of God. Mowinckel calls the acts and words of God as "sacramental acts and words" because they reveal the holiness and power of God to create or grant rain, fertility or victory in times of war or liberate the community from the oppression of others. On the other hand, the initiative of human beings to communicate to God through their expression of words and acts, particularly by bringing offerings, sacrifices, and prayers, and obeying the laws is called "sacrificial acts and words."[11] Through the inter-action of 'sacramental' and 'sacrificial' acts and words, the relationship between God and community is established and continued in the cult. The acts and words in the inter-active communication explain what originally had happened. Whether God has granted the prayers of the community or accepted their offerings and sacrifices or acted in the history and liberated them or granted rain, fertility of the soil, harvest, protection from natural disaster and diseases, or deliverance from enemies can be known only when we analyse the communication happened between them. Whatever may be the result of the communication, Mowinckel summarizes these blessings of God to the community as 'life."[12] Life, according to him, means "salvation." The salvation achieved through the communication between God and community is actualised in the cult by celebrating the festivals. Celebrating the Passover festival actualised the liberation and exodus from Egypt. In celebrating the agricultural festivals, people acknowledged not only the goodness of God in granting rain, fertility of the soil and sustaining the lives of humans, plants and animals but also actualised the power of God over nature to create and continue the life on the earth. By celebrating the festivals, the community 'remembered' what God has done for them and 'reminded' their generation of all the deeds of God. The community 'actualises' the past and 'motivates' themselves to continue in communion with God.

---

[10] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 15.

[11] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 17.

[12] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 17.

In celebrating the festivals in the context of cult, they realized the presence of God in the midst of them. God's presence in their cultic celebration, represented either by the presence of the Ark of the Covenant or in the form of a cloud or a voice or carried out through symbolic rituals, makes the remembrance of the message of the festival or festal myth into a living reality. Cult in ancient Israel was not mere ritual but creative because of the interactive communication between God and the community. It energized the community through repeated celebration of the festivals to remember the act of God in their socio-economic and political history. It enhanced constantly the vision of God and strengthened their self-identity as the people of Yahweh. It became the context for the formation of and remembering the tradition. The inter-action of community, cult and communication is highlighted further as we discuss the origin, development, message of the festivals and fasts and the way they were celebrated as ritual events and interactive process in developing the society.

3. Festivals: History and Theology

Ancient Israel, like any other community, celebrated a number of feasts and fasts. Some of them are secular and not linked to their cult. A list of religious festivals and fasts celebrated is given in Ex 23:14-19, Num 28-29, Lev 23 and Dt 16:1-17. Each of these references in the Pentateuch mentions certain feasts and fasts and leaves out other feasts.

a. Pastoral Feast of Passover

The feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread, the two originally separate festivals, were combined and presented as one festival in Ex 12:1-13:16; 23:15; 34:18-20, 25; Lev 23:4-14; Num 28:16-25 and Dt 16:1-8. Scholars have studied the relation of the pastoral feast of Passover to the agricultural feast of Unleavened Bread and pointed out the way these two different festivals were linked together at a later stage.[13] The first reference to the event of Passover in the narration of the OT appears in Ex 12-13 in the context of oppression in Egypt and liberation from slavery. However, major part of the information in Ex 12-13 comes from the Priestly source dating around BC 450-400.[14] The Israelites had to gather as a congregation and kill their lambs in the evening (Ex12:6), roast and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (12:8). This feast was not merely a family dinner but a "sacrifice to Yahweh" because they gathered as a congregation at a particular location in Egypt, sacrificed the selected lambs, sprinkled the blood on the altar and burnt the fat as an offering to Yahweh. Once this ritual of sacrifice was over, they were asked to apply the blood on the doorpost of their houses and stay inside the house. The entire lamb roasted should be eaten within that night and the remaining portion should be burnt on the following morning (12:10). The slaves and sojourners, who would be living in the midst of them after their settlement in Canaan, were allowed to take part in the feast if they were circumcised and incorporated into the congregation of Yahweh. This feast was held for one day but followed by the feast of the Unleavened Bread for a week. Ex 12:28 proves the actual happening of the Passover feast in the land of Egypt. But the Passover feast was not new to the Israelites. Scholars are of the opinion that nomadic community including the patriarchs of Israelites observed it during the spring season by sacrificing a young animal in order to secure the continuance of fertility of sheep and cattle and the prosperity of their flock.[15] It was celebrated as they pitched their tent in a new place and make arrangement to take their flock for pasturing during spring season. It was an offering for the welfare of the flock. It is doubtful whether the nomads offered the sacrifice to redeem the first-born son in the family. Such a view of offering the sacrifice to redeem the first born in the family could have been inserted into the presentation of Ex 12:1-13:16 to link the feast of Passover to redeem the first born male and animal in Israel (13:1, 11-16) after seeing the death of the first born of Egypt and sparing their first born.[16] But the nomads sprinkled the blood of the sacrificed animal on the doorposts of their tents to drive out the evil spirits attacking their flock. Scholars notice the traits of this nomadic festival such as collective participation, offering of sacrifice from the flock and not from herd, roasting the sacrificed lamb, sprinkling the blood on the doorposts of the tents, eating at night in hurry in the text of Ex 12-13. They affirm the nomadic origin of the feast of Passover.[17] This practice of the Passover feast observed by the patriarchs and their descendants could have been the reason for the bonded Israelites asking Pharaoh to allow them to go out and celebrate the feast (Ex 5:1-3). Since they were denied permission to celebrate their traditional pastoral festival, they were commanded by Yahweh to celebrate it within Egypt (Ex 12) at the cost of the first born of the Egyptian families. This pastoral festival took the name of 'Passover' from the Hebrew term '*paseh*' referring to "Yahweh's passing over" the houses of the Israelites and sparing their lives. The aspect of redeeming the first born of the Israelite families after the exodus by offering the sacrifice to Yahweh became an integrated element at the event of the feast of Passover (13:1) after exodus.

---

[13] H. G. Mays, "The Relation of the Passover to the Festival of Unleavened Cakes," JBL, 55 (1936), 65-82.

[14] G. Fohrer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, London: SPCK, 1976, 180. This author assigns Ex 12:1-20, 28, 40-51; 13:1-2 to P source.

[15] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 489.

The Israelites were commanded at the event of the Passover feast in Egypt to observe the feast forever. It became an ordinance to them is known to us from Ex 12:14. The feast of Passover continued in Israel is evident from the celebration recorded in historical text (Josh 5:10-12; 2Kings 23:21-23; 2Chro 30; 35:1-18; Ezra 6:19-22). Whether the Passover was celebrated each year was doubtful. 2Kings 23:22 speaks of lapses in celebrating this festival in pre-exilic period. We are furthermore not clear about the celebration of Passover during their exile in Babylon. But it was revived during the rule of Josiah and after returning from exile (Ezra 6:19-22). Although one can notice slight changes in the way they celebrated it from the period of bondage in Egypt to the period of Judges and Kings and post-exilic, the following salient features of the Passover were not changed.

---

[16] M. Haran, "The Passover Sacrifice," VTS, 23 (1972), 89-90; Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 489.

[17] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 494.

i) The Passover feast continued as a community feast. The entire community of Israel celebrated it including those slaves and sojourners who were circumcised and joined the assembly. Women were not excluded.

ii) It was held in the same month of Abib irrespective of changes in their political history. It was a nation-wide community celebration on the same day of Abib, which became the first month in their calendar due to the event of deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Ex 12:1-2).

iii) The cultic dimension of the festival was upheld since the animal was killed not at their homes but at the site of the cultic centre when they gathered as the congregation. The sacrifices were regarded as holy to Yahweh.

iv) The celebration of the Passover held at the local cultic centres in each town during the settlement period was transferred to the central sanctuary under the amphictyony (2Kings 23:22) and to Jerusalem after the construction of the temple (2Chro 35:18). Centralization of the cult in Jerusalem led the Israelites to go on a pilgrimage and celebrate the festival in Jerusalem.

v) The festal myth of liberation from Egypt was reiterated because they were required to tell the reason for celebrating the festival of Passover (Ex 12) to their generation. The historicization of the feast of Passover as liberation from bonded slavery in Egypt was re-enacted at the festival by commanding the participants to dress like a traveller, have a stick and eat the feast in a hurry (Ex 12). The generations that never experienced slavery and liberation internalise this experience as their heritage by enacting the rituals of the feast.

vi) This nomadic festival is theologised in Israel as redeeming the first-born son and animal by offering the sacrifice and gaining liberation and freedom from slavery. Nomads were not slaves to anyone. They wandered with their flocks and herds as free people. They found no geographical limitation to pasture their sheep and cattle. The farming community of ancient Israel which cherished the ideal of freedom could no longer accept slavery and to be servants of Pharaoh. The experience of liberation from Egypt formulated the belief of Yahweh as the God of liberation and strengthened the ideal of freedom and rights of human beings. The Israelite community inherited the theology that their God is liberator at the event of Passover. They communicated the theology and history of liberation and redemption as the message of the festival to their generations by celebrating the Passover and actualising the experience of liberation.

b. Feast of Unleavened Bread

Although the feast of Unleavened Bread is mentioned in connection with the event of Passover in Ex 12-13, this festival was not celebrated at the time of exodus from Egypt. The Hebrew term '*massoth*' which means "unleavened or unfermented bread" indicates the connection of the feast of Unleavened Bread with agriculture. Since the Israelites who entered the land of Canaan and pitched their camp in Gilgal celebrated the Passover and ate the produce of the land as the manna ceased, it is possible that the feast of Unleavened Bread was celebrated for the first time in continuation with the Passover (Josh 5:10-12). The feast of Passover and Unleavened Bread at Gilgal marked a new beginning in the history of Israel. Their struggle for liberation reached its fulfilment as they celebrated these festivals on their arrival at Gilgal. We are not told clearly by the accounts of Joshua whether they ate the produce of their own cultivation. They might have purchased the grains from the Canaanites or gathered it from the fields. But after learning the agriculture from the Canaanites, they celebrated the feast of Unleavened Bread with the produce of their cultivation. Since the Canaanites celebrated a similar festival as they harvested barley, it is believed that the Israelites had borrowed this festival from the Canaanites. The feast was celebrated for seven days beginning and concluding it with a gathering of the community on the Sabbath. The important ritual of this feast is to eat the unleavened bread made out of the new grains for seven days. Bread should not be made with flour of the previous harvest and with leaven. The Israelites were required not to appear before Yahweh empty hand but to bring the offerings all the seven days of their celebration. Sacrifices were offered as burnt offering and sin offering (Num 28:16-25). Initially, it was a community celebration at the local cultic centres in villages and towns before it was transferred to the temple in Jerusalem and made a pilgrimage festival. The feast of Unleavened Bread marked the beginning of the harvest season and represented the beginning of the new year. Their history of liberation and harvesting of the barley, the first fruit of the season, led them to mark the month of Abib as the beginning of the new year for the Israelites. The festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread gave them the meaning of the new beginning in their lives because the liberation from slavery and eating the produce of the Promised Land happened in the month of Abib.

The following are the salient features of the feast of Unleavened Bread:

i) Canaanites celebrated the same festival to mark the harvest of barley. But this feast is linked with the system of week in Israel and the celebration went on for seven days.

ii) It also provided the basis for calculating another seven weeks to mark the harvest of wheat. Their calendar for harvesting wheat speaks of seven weeks from the harvest of barley.

iii) It is linked with the Sabbath because the feast began with the solemn assembly on the Sabbath and concluded on the following Sabbath. The cultic dimension was maintained by bringing offerings and sacrifices to Yahweh on these seven days.

iv) It is connected with the history of liberation from Egypt by celebrating it in continuation with the celebration of Passover. If the Passover marks the new beginning of their freedom from oppression, the Unleavened Bread marks the fulfilment of the exodus and beginning of their agrarian life in Canaan.

v) The borrowed festival of the Unleavened Bread is indigenised in Israel by celebrating it to commemorate the beginning of their history in Canaan rather than observing the fertility cult of Canaan. By eating the unleavened bread at the beginning of each year, their generations could remember the past history and the fulfilment of Yahweh's promises to their ancestors. It is theologised as the feast of Yahweh since Yahweh has acted in the history of their salvation.

vi) Anyone eats leavened food was punished by being excommunicated from the membership of the community (Ex 12:17-20). Following strictly the rituals of the feast, and observation of the Sabbath before and after the celebration strengthened the solidarity of the whole Israelite community.

c. Feast of Weeks

The festival of Weeks is connected with the harvest of wheat. It is called as the "Feast of Weeks" because it was celebrated after seven weeks of the harvest of barley. If the feast of Unleavened Bread marked the beginning of harvesting the cereal, the feast of Weeks concluded the harvesting season of the year. Since the feast of Weeks was celebrated on the fiftieth day after the harvest of wheat, it is known later as the feast of the Pentecost. This feast began after the day of Sabbath by presenting the first sheaf of wheat to Yahweh. It was celebrated for seven days concluding on the following Sabbath (Lev 23:21). The important ritual of the feast is to offer two loaves of bread made out of the flour of wheat harvested recently and baked with leaven. In addition to this offering of bread, they had to offer sacrifices of lambs, bulls and rams as burnt offering. Drink offering was also demanded of them. The accounts of Lev 23:15-21 and Num 28:26-31 differ regarding the list of animal sacrifices and other offerings to be brought to Yahweh. The feast of Weeks required the use of leaven, which was prohibited in the feast of Unleavened Bread. The offering of the leavened bread to Yahweh signifies the nature of the feast as farmers' feast.[18] The farming community such as the Canaanites leading a settled life used the leavened bread as their common food. The Israelites who borrowed this festival from the Canaanites celebrated the feast of Weeks on the third month of the year and linked the feast of Weeks with their history of liberation from slavery (Dt 16:12). Neither of the accounts in Ex 23, Lev 23, Num 28 and Dt 16 connects this feast with the making of the covenant at Sinai or renewal of the covenant through the celebration. Dt 16:12 indicates its link with the liberation and not with the event of making a covenant at Sinai. But scholars infer from the narration in 2Chron 15:10 that the festival celebrated during the third month (during the reform of Asa) was the feast of the Weeks.[19] The important aspect of the feast was the renewal of the covenant. On the one hand, assuming the festival celebrated on the third month refers to the feast of Weeks is questionable. But, on the other hand, the third month marked the harvest of wheat and so Asa could have celebrated the feast of Weeks and brought in the aspect of renewal of the covenant to be incorporated into the feast. Another inference to consider the feast of Weeks to be associated with the covenant could be the demand of sin offering as an important aspect of the celebration (Num 28:22). Sin offering included in this feast means the necessity to seek the forgiveness for violating the laws of the Covenant. So in celebrating the feast of Weeks, it is possible, the Israelite community commemorated the covenant at Sinai rather than the fertility of the land. Mowinkel believes that Yahweh accepts the offerings and sacrifices of the festival and comes to renew the covenant made at Sinai and renews all the blessings to the community in celebration.[20]

---

[18] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 494.

[19] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 496, 501.

In addition to the salient features of this feast, marking the end of the harvest season and using the leavened bread in the offering to Yahweh, the following two features can be mentioned.

i) The borrowed feast of weeks is indigenised by historicizing. It is linked to their history of salvation and making of the covenant during the third month of their arrival in Sinai. It is used as a tool to remember the Covenant, renew it each year and express the commitment of the Israelites to follow the law given at Sinai.

ii) This feast is theologised to express the view that Yahweh who liberated them from Egypt is the God of the Covenant and is concerned about the relationship between them. Yahweh and Israel had mutual responsibility of keeping the covenant. Yahweh, on his part, had to provide the needed rain, fertility of the soil and posterity. Israel, on her part, had to fulfil the laws and ordinances of Yahweh.

d. Feast of Ingathering or Tent

The feast of Ingathering, another agricultural festival in Israel, was celebrated each year as they gathered the fruits in autumn season (Ex 23:16; 34:22). During their settlement period, it was held at Shiloh (Jud 21:19; 1Sam 1:3) but was transferred to the temple in Jerusalem at a later stage and transformed it into another pilgrimage festival. The celebration of their festival went on for seven days beginning and concluding on the Sabbath day in the seventh month (Lev 23:33, 39). The Israelites were asked to take the fruits, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees and willows of the brook, and go in procession rejoicing before Yahweh (Lev 23:40) as an important ritual in addition to the offerings and sacrifices (Lev 23:36, Num 29:12-34). We come to know the treading of wine, drinking and dancing connected with the celebration of this festival from the accounts of Judges 9:27 and 21:19-21. This feast closely linked to the gathering of the produce of the land was borrowed from the Canaanites and celebrated as a farmers' feast (Ex 23:16). The main purpose of the festival was to thank Yahweh for the blessings of the land.[21]

---

[20] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 154f.

It gained, however, another dimension as the Feast of Tents at a later stage (Lev 23:34; Dt 16:13-15). The Hebrew word '*sukkoth*' means 'hut' and not tent. The celebration of the feast of Ingathering required all the citizens of Israel to go out of their houses and live in booths made out of branches and leaves. The reason for this requirement is to teach the generations that their ancestors who came out of the slavery in Egypt, lived in tents in the wilderness (Lev 23:42-43). Thus, this feast was linked to the history of salvation.

In addition to the usual features of agricultural festivals such as a celebration of feasts as a community with a close link to Sabbath and cultic centres, we can point out two special features of this feast.

i) Gathering the fruits of the land is to rejoice over the fruits of their hard labour in their land as well as to thank Yahweh for granting the produce and sustaining the supply of food to their community. The theology is that they were not worshipping the creation as happened in the cult of Baal but worshipping the creator and sustainer of nature. The Israelites indigenised the borrowed fertility cult of the Canaanites as a "feast of Yahweh," the creator and liberator.

ii) Going out and living in huts was not to escape the attack of evil spirits as thought of by some other agricultural communities.[22] The requirement of living in huts for seven days was to remember the sojourning experience of their ancestors in the wilderness of Sinai and remind themselves as sojourners in the land given by Yahweh. It reminded them of their status of landless people and their responsibility to live and use the land as sojourners and aliens (See Lev 25:23). Yahweh's ownership of the land and the Israelites stewardship of the resources are implied in the celebration of the feast of Ingathering.

---

[21] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 496, 501.

[22] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 500ff.

e. Day of Atonement

The Day of Atonement known as "*Yom Kippur*" is regarded as another appointed fast to be observed by the Israelites. Since all the references to this fast comes from the later source of P (Lev 16, 23:26-32; Num 29:7-11), it should have been introduced as an important observance at a later period in their history. However, offering sacrifices for the atonement of sin could have been practised for a long time before making it as an appointed fast. According to Lev 23:26-32, the day of atonement began on the evening of the ninth day and extended up to the evening of the tenth day in the seventh month. The ritual of the *Yom Kippur* includes the rest on the day it was celebrated. People have to express their self-denial by fasting the whole day. Sacrifices of bull, ram and lamb were offered for the atonement of sin (Lev 23:27; Num 29:8). The accounts of Lev 16 speak of two kinds of goats and sacrifices. The goat selected for sacrifice was offered to Yahweh. The other goat (*azazel*) was made to carry the sin of the community by a ritual of placing the hand on the head of the goat and sending it out of their region to the wilderness. The expiation also administered at stages. The first stage of the sacrifice was for the atonement of the sins of the priests and cleaning and sanctifying the altars. The second stage of the atonement was for the sins of the community. Roland De Vaux notices different layers of the texts edited at different stages and presented in Lev 16 as the reason for two kinds of goats and sacrifices and rejects any link with the episode in Lev 10:1-6.[23] Since the Day of Atonement became a fast for the entire community in later periods, it could have been associated with the second temple in the post-exilic period. Whether all citizens of Israel were asked to assemble in Jerusalem for the Day of Atonement is doubtful because it was considered as a pilgrimage (*hag*). While the ritual of sacrifice took place in Jerusalem, the Israelites could have observed the ritual of rest, fast and sacrificing the animal on that day in their own villages and towns. Members who disobey to observe the ritual of rest, fasting and taking part in the atonement sacrifice were to be ex-communicated from the community.

---

[23] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 507-510.

The salient features of the Day of Atonement are the following:

i) It was celebrated as a fast annually in addition to the usual sin offering brought by the people to the priests. But by making it an annual event in the temple, this fast of the Day of Atonement called the people nationwide for analysing their lives, penitence and seeking forgiveness as a nation. It was a national fast for the corporate sin of the country.

ii) It emphasized the holy living of the priests and people.

iii) The symbolic action of sending out the goat (*azazel*) carrying the sins of the community could have been dramatic. We can notice similar ritual using pigeons, chickens and even goats in some festivals celebrated for the deities of villages in India.

iv) The theology behind this fast is that Yahweh is a holy God and expects the people to be holy and the altars of the worshipping place to be kept sanctified.

f. Sabbath and the Festival of Trumpet

The Sabbath is included in the list of appointed festivals (Lev 23:3). In addition to this reference to Sabbath, the list mentions another Sabbath as a festival of trumpet (Lev 23:23-25) on the first day of the seventh month. The ritual of the festival of trumpet in the seventh month includes complete rest, a holy convocation commemorated with trumpet blasts (23:24) and a sacrifice of bull, ram and seven lambs as burnt offering along with grain offering (Num 29:1-6). The seventh month was marked for celebrations. The Day of Atonement and the feast of Ingathering or Tent went on the 10th and 15th day, respectively, on the seventh month. The seventh month that falls in the autumn season could be the old civil and religious new year. Whether the feast of Trumpet celebrated on the first day of the seventh month had any connection with the new year feast celebrated in the later post-exilic period is questionable. The exact reason for instituting the feast of Trumpet is also not clear. Perhaps, this festival could be to calculate and regularize the Sabbath days in the calendar after their return from exile. Scholars have discussed the possibility of the origin of Sabbath in Babylon, Assyria and Canaan.[24] The celebration of Sabbath could have been borrowed by the Israelites because keeping days of rest at regular intervals was found in other cultures too. But the Israelites did not limit to the full moon day in a month. The Israelites have made the seventh day as the Sabbath and declared it as solemn rest to the family and animals. The sociological concern of rest from work was the earliest purpose for the observance of the Sabbath. But it was theologised to be regarded as a rest for Yahweh, too, because, first, God rested on the seventh day after creating for six days. Roland De Vaux says: "This idea of God's resting is not an anthropomorphism, but the expression of a theological idea: creation is the first action in the history of salvation; once it was over, God stopped work, and he was then able to make a covenant with his creature."[25] Second, the rest became a law by bringing it as a requirement in the Covenant made at Sinai (Ex 20:8-11). The Sabbath is linked with creation and covenant and made as a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel (Ex 31:12-17). Third, the exodus event did not institute the Sabbath. On the other hand, the Sabbath as a sign of the covenant is linked to their history of liberation from slavery. So observance of Sabbath means remembering their slavery and rendering rest and deliverance to slaves.[26] The seed to make Sabbath as a festival could have been sown during the exilic period because Ezekiel emphasizes the observance of Sabbath (Ezek 20:13-20, 22:26, 23:38). Sabbath gained importance during exile because the Israelites could not have the temple to offer sacrifices and celebrate other festivals connected with sacrifices. The post-exilic situation led the Israelites to make it an annual special festival during the seventh month in addition to regular weekly observances. This could be inferred from the details about the festival of Trumpet coming from the later sources such as Isa 58:13 and Priestly document of Lev 23.

The following are the salient features of the festival of Trumpet:

---

[24] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 476-480.

[25] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 481.

[26] Niels-Erik Andreasen, "Festival and Freedom: A Study of Old Testament Theme," *Interpretation*, 28,3 (1974), 281-297.

i) The observance of Sabbath in Israel gave rest to human beings and animals once in seven days instead of once in a month on the full moon day.

ii) It is detached from the order of lunar calendar, and, thus, from nature cycle and fertility cult and attached to the order of creation (Gen 1-2).

iii) It is made as a law by linking it with the Decalogue, an integral part of the covenant at Sinai. Thus, Sabbath gained the theological dimension. Roland De Vaux writes: "Whatever its origin was, the Sabbath took on a particular meaning which made it an institution peculiar to Israel. Its characteristic feature lies not in the regularity with which it recurs, nor in the cessation of work, nor in the various prohibitions, which the cessation of work implies: all this is found, more or less, in other civilizations. Its distinctive trait lies in the fact that it is a day made holy because of its relation to the God of the Covenant; more, it is an element in that Covenant."[27]

iv) It is a sign of Israel's state of holiness by requiring the people to appear before Yahweh on the usual Sabbath day and with ritual sacrifices on the seventh month.

v) This dimension of sanctification of people on the Sabbath day became an integral part of celebrating other festivals such as Passover, Unleavened Bread, feast of the Weeks and feast of the Ingathering. Observance of the Sabbath day before and after celebrating these festivals functioned as a preparation for the sanctity of Israel.

vi) Since Sabbath was made a sacred sign of the covenant, observing it became a necessity. They remind themselves of their longing for rest during their slavery in Egypt and render rest and deliverance to others. It was another guarantee of salvation (Isa 58:13-14, 56:2; Jer 17:19-27).

g. Enthronement Festival

The list of the appointed feasts does not mention the festival of Enthronement. But it has to be included here for discussion because of references to the actual enthronement of kings in Israel (1Sam 10:1; 2Sam

---

[27] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 480.

5:1-5; 1Kings 1:38-40) and the statement of "*Yahweh malek*" appearing in some psalms (Ps 47, 93, 96). Enthronement of kings in Israel happened whenever a new king was selected. Such a celebration of coronation was occasional and not a regular annual event at the beginning of new year. But scholars argue that the Enthronement of Yahweh as a festival was celebrated in the form of a drama at the beginning of new year.[28] For, they believe that such an enthronement festival was celebrated at the beginning of new year in the Ancient Near Eastern countries, particularly in Canaan. The drama of Baal fighting and overcoming Mot and sitting on the throne victoriously was celebrated each year as their *El Elyon* festival in Jebusite territory.[29] Another argument is to read the phrase "*Yahweh malek*" as "Yahweh has become king" and suggest that the enthronement psalms were used as liturgy at the time of enthronement festival.[30] If so, then the question is about the exact festival in which enthronement of Yahweh could have been enacted. Mowinkel argues that Psalm 65 indicates the festival of Ingathering or Tent as the location for the enthronement of Yahweh.[31] But other scholars question the above theories and reject the view that the Israelites celebrated the enthronement of Yahweh as a festival at the time of new year. They interpret "*Yahweh malek*" as "Yahweh reigns," referring to the sovereignty of Yahweh, and accept the notion of Yahweh's kingship. Moreover, the feast of Ingathering was celebrated on the seventh month. If the Enthronement festival was celebrated in the new year, then, it could not have been linked to the feast of Ingathering. According to their arguments, there could not have been annual festival of enthronement of Yahweh. However, Israelites who borrowed the concept of kingship from the Canaanites modified it and acclaimed Yahweh as their king. It is my opinion that they would have proclaimed Yahweh's sovereignty over nature and nations probably at the time of coronation of kings in Israel or whenever they celebrated victory over their enemies. The Israelite need not have enacted a drama of enthronement of Yahweh during these celebrations but proclaimed definitely Yahweh's kingship and authority over the community by reciting the enthronement psalms. The salient features of Yahweh's kingship remembered in Israel are the following:

---

[28] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 504; the author lists the arguments of various scholars in this regard.

[29] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 125.

[30] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 117, 115.

[31] Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 119.

i) Yahweh's sovereignty is not only over Israel but also over other nations and nature. Yahweh never dies as Baal dies in Canaanite mythology. Yahweh is victorious forever. So enthronement of Yahweh is detached from fertility cult.

ii) Yahweh is the king, and human kings are only representatives of Yahweh to rule the people with divine values.

iii) Enthronement festival of kings in Israel with the acclamation of "Yahweh is King" paved the way for the concept of Kingdom of God and Messianic ideals.

h. Festival of Purim

The festival of Purim is another annual celebration instituted in the period of Esther. This festival is not listed in the appointed festivals given in Lev 23 because it was instituted after the compilation of the Priestly code. This festival received its name '*purim*' from the Akkadian root '*pur*' which means 'lot' or 'destiny' referring to the lot and destiny of the Jews at risk during the plot of Haman. Scholars notice festivals similar to the Jewish Purim in other cultures, too.[32] The festival narrated in the story of Esther was not borrowed from any other culture but grew out of their historical situation in Persia. As such the festival of Purim is not mythological about the struggle between good and evil as described in other cultures. It was an achievement of deliverance from genocide due to the timely effort of Mordecai and Esther (Esther 8:16). It brought light and gladness to the Jewish community, and, therefore, the festival of Purim was also known as the festival of light. In order to commemorate the deliverance from the wicked plan of Haman, the Israelite in Persian Diaspora celebrated it on the 14th to 15th day of the month of Adar. The rituals of this festival include feasting and gladness, sending gifts of food to one another and resting on the 15th day of Adar (Esther 9:18-19). Later on, going to the synagogue and reading the Book of Esther and pronouncing the blessing of Mordecai on Jewish community were added as part of the festival.[33]

---

[32] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 516.

[33] Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 514.

Whether sacrifices and other offerings were made during the festival is not clear. The salient features of the festival are four:

i) The festival of Purim is connected with the history of deliverance from genocide. So this festival has a political dimension and speaks of their salvation history.

ii) By making it a festival and calling the 15th day of Adar for complete rest and feasting, it reminds them of God's intervention and protecting their existence in foreign land.

iii) The symbolism of light during the festival indicates the victory over the darkness of evil and hope of life for the Jews in Diaspora.

iv) The celebration of this festival in Diaspora was also a warning to the ruling majority not to oppress the minority aliens in their land.

. The above study of the selected festivals and fasts brings out their ritual activities, content and other salient features. Whether festivals and fasts are mere rituals of religious obligation and celebration or inter-active communication needs a discussion here because of the relationship between community, festivals and communication.

4. Festivals, Inter-Active Communication and Community Development

Festivals can be regarded as an "annul programme" or a "system of orientation" rather than an instrument of communication such as radio or television. Festivals are part of "traditional media" and a process of inter-active communication.[34] Let me point out the characteristic of "inter-active communication" and a definition of "community development" and then show how the inter-active communication contributes for the development of the community. The inter-active communication requires an active role of the participants in communicating the message. The power of communication is not rested in the hands of one partner in the community but shared and experienced by all partners. It makes the participants to share the experience and their culture with one another. The inter-active communication, according to Neville Jayaweera, does not stop with passing on the message but transforms the people involved and builds the community.[35] The inter-active communication during the celebration of the festivals contributed to the development can be highlighted below from the above-mentioned salient features of each festival. The main thrust of most of the definition on community development is on the socio-economic development of the people. Many people confuse the concept of community development with the projects and activities such as providing drinking water, digging of irrigation canals, establishing schools and clinics and starting poultry farms for employment, etc. The focus, in this kind of understanding, is on activities rather than people. The idea of community development is reduced to fulfil the programmes and achieve the activities rather than developing the community. Robert Litteral quotes a definition of community development from the writing of Yost and Yost as "... the process whereby a community is strengthened so that it can creatively meet its needs (spiritual, mental, physical, social) through expansion of awareness, increased inter-action within and without the community, and the development and effective utilization of available resources."[36]

---

[34] A. D. Manual, *Communication and the Church*, Delhi: ISPCK, 1998, 28-30.

a. Festivals, as shown above, are celebrations of not individuals but the community of Israel. They were not the private affairs of families. The participants were priests, rulers, elders, parents, children, slaves and sojourners in the midst of them. Festivals celebrated nationwide integrated them as one community. The sociological and cultural integration took place at different levels. First, by requiring the members of the family to take part in the festivals, the celebration united the family. The celebration of festivals in the cultic centres in their own villages and towns, and, later, in Jerusalem fostered fellowship between families, clans and tribes and reminded them of their identity as people of Yahweh even though they were settled in different regions of the promised land.

b. The inter-active process was enhanced further by requiring the members of the community to take part in the sacrifices and the meal afterwards. Feasting together with families, relatives and friends at the site of the cultic centres or at homes and rejoicing strengthened their communion. Celebrations helped them to forget their differences and problems and rejoice over the goodness of Yahweh. Festivals contributed to the presence and maintenance of gladness in the community.

---

[35] Jayaweera, "Communication for Community," 8.

[36] R. L. Litteral, *Community Partnership in Communications for Ministry*, Wheaton: Billy Graham Centre Monograph, 1988, 40.

c. God inter-acted with the community in the festivals by appearing or being represented through cloud, voice or fire and accepting their sacrifices and offerings and blessing the people. The inter-action between God and community in festivals strengthened their relationship and reminded them of their mutual commitment.

d. They gathered not merely for celebration but for a definite purpose of understanding, remembering and realizing the message of each festival. They inter-act by communicating to themselves the message of the festivals. The leaders and parents were required to communicate the meaning of festival to the children and make them actively involved in celebrating the festivals meaningfully. Celebrations of festivals such as Passover, Ingathering and Purim brought an awareness about their history of bonded slavery in Egypt, living as landless sojourners in the wilderness of Sinai and entering into a covenant and deliverance from the genocide in Persia. Political history came alive to them at each festival. The participants experienced their past history in the celebration, and enhanced their spirit of patriotism to work for the progress of society and build their nation to be free from oppression of foreign nations.

e. The power of communication was not rested with certain authorities such as priests or rulers or prophets or parents but was shared within the entire community including children, slaves and sojourners. Festivals were dialogical among the members of the community and by reciting the prayers and liturgies when they met in a solemn assembly. They were inter-active in realizing the meaning of Yahweh's action in their salvation history. In realizing the history and theology of the festivals, the participants shared among themselves the historical experience and expressed their history and theology through songs (Ps 95; 105, 137) and dance (Ex15:1-21). This realization contributed to the development of their folklore, art and dance.

f. Festivals of Unleavened Bread, feasts of Weeks and Ingathering rooted the community in the vocation of agriculture and value hard work on the land and producing food for the community. They motivated them to be self-supporting and self-reliant by continuing the ploughing, sowing and harvesting rather than neglecting agriculture and valuing other crafts and professions. In agriculture, the inter-action between families in villages and with Yahweh could be realized more. For, they were partners. The partnership of Yahweh was shown in granting rain and harvest. Although Israelites attributed the blessing of the land to Yahweh, they realized their responsibility of giving hard labour and producing grains, vegetables and fruits. Some of the psalms used during pilgrimage to celebrate the festivals reveal their responsibility towards agriculture and dependency on Yahweh for the blessing (Ps 126:5-6; 128:1-5; 133:1-3). The idea of Yahweh as the owner of the land and the Israelites as the sojourners and stewards of the land is reflected through the festival of Ingathering. Agrarian economy is not merely the activity of the people alone but also the joint activity of God and the people. This kind of a vision and spirituality contributed to the development of their economy.

g. Agricultural festivals manifested not only the faith of the Israelites in Yahweh but also their spirituality of non-compromise with the cult of Canaan. Their spirituality based on the action of Yahweh in their history shaped their theology of creation and enabled them to indigenise the Canaanite festivals to express their faith and values of Yahweh. The process of indigenisation removed the inhuman practices linked with the Canaanite festivals such as requiring the children to walk on fire, parents to sacrifice their sons and daughters and engage in cult prostitution and worship the plants and trees rather than the creator. Prophets condemned the Israelites for following such practices (Jer 3:1-6; 2:23; Hosea 2:13; Amos 2:7).

h. The calendar of the Israelites was not based on the Canaanite agrarian calendar that followed the cycle of nature. Festivals brought a change in working out their calendar based on the action of Yahweh in their history. Their day-to-day life was not controlled by the moving of sun, moon and stars but by the actions of Yahweh. That is why, they made the month of Abib, in which the liberation from bonded slavery took place, as the first month in their calendar. Festival of Passover marked the beginning of the year. Their calendar began with the experience of liberation rather than depending on the mercy of nature and movement of the planets. They used the seasons of autumn, spring and summer for agriculture but did not make these seasons, which are in the control of Yahweh to control their calendar. It is not the creation but the creator and their salvation history became the basis of guiding principles of the events of their community.

i. Observing the Sabbath rest before and after the festivals developed not only their spiritual dimension of "resting for Yahweh" but also the social dimension of resting for physical need. Rest from work is needed for human beings and animals. People and animals cannot be treated as machines in production. The rest demanded during the celebration of festivals, in addition to regular weekly rest, regenerated their energy and strength. The rest is not a privilege for the landlords or rulers in Israel but an obligation for all, including the slaves, servants and animals. Rest and celebration provided freshness to mind and body.

j. Protecting the rights of human beings is another important aspect in developing the society. The Passover festival was a constant reminder to the community not to oppress others. Slaves and servants have their right to go free from oppression. The masters need not wait for the sabbatical year or Jubilee year to release their slaves. They can very well do it in each year during the festival of Passover. A note attached to the agricultural festivals as a standing rule to leave the remaining harvest for the sake of the poor in Lev 23:22 expressed a sociological concern for the downtrodden in the society. Sharing of the resources with the needy helps to narrow down the gap between the rich and poor and alleviate poverty in the midst of them to a certain extent. The celebration of Purim provided hope for the minority community of Jews in diaspora by challenging the misuse of political power and authority. The festival of Purim stood as a warning to protect the rights of the minorities from racial discrimination and genocide and allow them to progress.

5. Conclusion

The festivals, no doubt, had contributed to the spiritual, theological, political, sociological and economic development of ancient Israel. The principles of adopting festivals from the local context, indigenising their form and content, historicizing and theologizing festivals and integrating to the ethical life of the community are challenges to us.

How can our festivals such as Christmas, New Year, Easter and other local festivals of Protestant and Roman Catholic churches enhance the inter-active communication among Christians and contribute towards the development of society? Certainly, some of our festivals have become mere ritual events. Others have become commercial to promote the sale of greetings cards, decorations, sweets and gifts. Christians in India need to find the ways to make festivals more effective in integrating the people and promoting service to others. In addition to the celebration of harvest festivals in local churches, Christians could explore the possibility of celebrating festivals such as Pongal, Onam and Deepavali with the neighbours by indigenising their content and form.

National integration can be strengthened further if all the religious communities in India could make the Independence Day the festival of liberation from the rulers of foreign nations by celebrating it in their cultic centres. Such a festival has a history behind and can be theologized. It could become like a Passover festival for Indians, a festive occasion to bring together Indians as a single community, with a common nucleus to celebrate with.

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 366-376

MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE OF FEASTS AND FESTIVALS IN HUMAN SOCIETY

S. M. Michael◆

1. Introduction

There is a growing trend in anthropology to understand humankind through its experience. The anthropology of experience deals with how individuals actually experience their culture.[1] In almost all cultures, life is experienced as pulsating and rhythmical. It is a combination of breaks and reunions. Rituals and rites are the means by which these experiences of life are communicated. Hence, experiences of humankind are heavily embedded in cultural symbols, particularly those of feasts, festivals, rituals, celebrations and other powerful performative genres.

In every human society, life itself is a celebration of giving meaning to different events of human existence as people encounter changes in their own lives and in the environment. For centuries, different cultures have experienced life in different ways and these experiences are stored in different rituals, symbols and myths. Thus, rites and rituals are impregnated with meaning.

In order to be alive and active, a culture has to relive its experiences. This means that the experiences stored in rituals are to be enacted, myths recited, narratives retold, events of importance celebrated. These enactments, recitals, retellings and performances transform and enable the

---

◆ **Dr. S. M. Michael** is Professor of Anthropology, University of Mumbai; he is one of the consulters for the Pontifical Commission for Inter-religious Dialogue, Rome, and the Programme Co-ordinator of the Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai.

[1] V. Turner and R. Burner, "Cultural Performance as Celebration," *Anthropology of Experience*, 23-47, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

people involved to re-experience the heritage of their culture. "Life consists of retellings."[2]

Studies show that in spite of urbanization, industrialization and modernization, these religious practices do not die out, rather they strengthen group solidarity, by modifying themselves and adjusting to new situations. Feasts and Festivals come under these aspects of cultural life of the people.

2. Feasts and Festivals: Experiential Dimensions of Life

The word 'festival' is derived from the Latin term *festum* (bright, rejoicing) to mean celebrations, also known as rest days, memorial days, holy days, and holidays. Although most feasts and festivals are religious in origin, many have a political and civic background. They are not merely known in every country, primitive, backward or advanced; they seem to date back to pre-historic times.

Feasts and festivals are related to the experiential dimensions of life. They are cultural celebrations. It is in the celebrations of the feast and festivals that a community re-experiences, re-lives, re-creates, re-tells, re-constructs and re-fashions its culture. Thus, festivals constitute a prime act of reflexivity, whereby a society gets shaped and reshaped. They can, thus, be considered as rites of intensification, whereby the values and solidarity of the society are enhanced.

3. Essential Aspects of Feasts and Festivals

The concept of festival embraces two modes: a) enjoyment and b) enrichment. Enjoyment (carnival) inverts the social order and leans towards breaking barriers between the rich and poor, between high and low in status, between the privileged and the underprivileged. Victor Turner refers to this equalizing process in celebrations as anti-structural, which is more or less subversive of the social order. *Communitas*, that is, universal fellow feeling, reigns for those who are willing to participate in the celebrations. Society looks at itself transformed. Enrichment is done by the performance of rituals and ceremonies, which celebrates the past memories making it a reality today giving meaning to human existence in the midst of death and life. It is the tension between these two dimensions of festival that gives it its warmth and power. Such tensions between enjoyment and enrichment are the seedbeds of cultural creativity of a community. Thus, everyone may participate in a festival because of its enjoyment element.

---

[2] Burner R., *Anthropology of Experience*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, 12.

Studies on feast and festivals by Milton Singer, Dell Hymes, Richard Bauman, Victor Turner and others have shown us that feasts and festivals are not only naturally occurring units of *meaning* but are also *periods of heightened activity* when a society's presuppositions are most exposed and the core values are expressed. Through the celebrations of feast and festivals the people involved give expression to the meanings of life, which their religion, culture and language have crystallized from the past.

4. Types of Feasts and Festivals

Classifying festivals tends to be problematic. They may be religious, political and national, economic, or sporting. Certain rites of passage may also be classified as festivals, because these rites and ceremonies empower the whole community. Although most festivals take place regularly on specific calendar dates, a broad division of feasts and festivals could be attempted in terms of domestic and social observances.

a. Seasonal Feasts and Festivals

In almost all human societies work and life tend to be governed by seasonal and ecological rhythms. Change in the environment, such as the alteration of the seasons and even the succession of day and night, the phases of the moon, or the progression of the seasons in their annual cycle involve a disturbance of all the members of a group. They are crises because in many societies, the food supply and the means of livelihood are so dependent upon the vagaries of the environment and its climatic conditions that these human groups live in a perpetual state of anxiety and uncertainty. Moreover, the changes in nature exert an alteration in the occupational rhythm of life. Consequently, these changes involve a readjustment of the interaction rates.

For example, in a country like India that is predominantly agricultural, important crises, that is, crises that involve relatively great changes of interaction rates, come in the spring at planting time, and in the fall at harvest. Some of the extensive cyclical rituals, such as planting ceremonies, mark the beginning of such a period; some others like the harvest rites, mark the end of a period of technical activity. The ritual techniques used in these crises enable individuals affected by the changes to build up the new interaction rates needed to restore their equilibrium. Human life needs to be adjusted to these changes in nature. Accordingly, every culture marks culturally recognized points in the passage of time such as first fruits, harvest, mid-summer, new year, new moon, etc.[3] The Babylonians, who paid earnest attention to lunar phenomena, were disturbed whenever the moon disappeared and declared such a period (at the end of the month) an unlucky day and a time of sorrow. Prayers were recited and expiatory rites performed, particularly for the king, who, it was believed, needed special protection on unlucky days. A prayer to the moon god 'Sin' describes the thirtieth day of the month as the god's holy day or festival.

b. Rites of Passage as Feast and Festivals

Every individual in a society undergoes different phases of life such as birth, puberty, adulthood, old age and death. From birth till death human beings take up different positions in life such as childhood, youth, marriage and parenthood. All these changes and positions in life involve different responsibilities and each of these changes disturbs the individual's equilibrium in relationship with the family and society. A person's ability to handle these situations is marked with uncertainties. Hence, these disturbances that involve marked changes in the habitual interaction rates of individuals are known as crisis. Every culture meets these crisis situations through various rituals so that an individual may pass through these stages without much stress and strain. These rites and rituals are called *rites of passage*.[4] These rites and rituals literally mark the passage of an individual from one state in his relations with other people to another state. Hence, these are marked with celebrations. A careful observation of different cultures would reveal the universality of these celebrations.

---

[3] See E. O. James, Comparative Religion: An Introductory and Historical Study, London: Methuen & Co., 1961.

[4] Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (First published in 1909), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.

The purpose of these rituals and celebrations is to transform an individual from one stage of life to another. These rites and celebrations are seen as both indicators and vehicles of transition from one socio-cultural state and status to another – childhood to maturity, virginity to marriage, childlessness to parenthood, sickness to health, death to ancestry, and so on. These ceremonies and specific rites also pay an important role in the ordering and reordering of social relations.[5]

Van Gennep pointed out that, when the activities associated with an individual's "life-crisis" ceremonies are examined in terms of their order and content, it is possible to distinguish three major phases: rites of *separation*, rites of *transition* and rites of *incorporation*. It is good to be aware of the essential characteristics of these three transitory stages in the life crisis rituals.

Normally, the "Rites of Passage" are associated with non-periodic changes such as birth and death, illness, and so on. The "Cyclical Rituals," on the other hand, are usually connected with the periodic changes; the daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly changes which are associated with changes in technology through the alternation of day and night and of the seasons. Most characteristically, however, the non-periodic changes producing the rite of passage affect a single individual specifically, and the rest of the group only through their relations with him or her, while those producing the Cyclic Rituals affect all the members of the group collectively. These rites, coming periodically, help to reinforce the habitual relations within the society. E. D. Chappell and C. S. Coon (1942) call these rites and rituals as "rites of intensification," since the goal of these celebrations is the strengthening of group unity.

---

[5] Gluckman S., *Sociology of Religion*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1962, 4.

These rites which accompany and bring about the change of seasons, year or month are also, according to van Gennep, ceremonies of passage. Certain feasts and festivals in different parts of India and in other geographical areas of the world may include rites of expulsion of winter and incorporation of spring, e.g., in *Holi*, the one dies and the other is reborn.[6]

c. Other Festivals

There are also political, national, economic or sporting festivals. Some of the political festivals celebrate the triumph of state power or celebrations of national independence. Among festivals of the economy can be countered trade exhibitions. Today sports have turned out to be occasions of big festivals all over the world. The major festivals of sports include the Olympic games, the World Series and the World Cup.

Here in this essay, however, we shall continue to concentrate only on Religious Feast and Festivals with special reference to Hinduism and Christianity.

5. Religious Feast and Festivals

Religions regularly celebrate the anniversaries associated with their gods or founders, holy figures, or even other connected great events. As religious, many of them were in ancient times prohibitory, or sacrificial and laudatory, and stemmed from nature worship and ancestor worship, and were rituals within the cult of the dead. In relation to the dead, annual and monthly feasts or banquets were times of fellowship with the dead, to whom offerings were made. Nature worship, particularly common among nomadic peoples, entailed reverence toward the sun and moon, and rites around solar and lunar feasts. Among agricultural peoples, sunshine and rain, winter and summer, seedtime and harvest were, and are, of vital importance; hence, their feasts are solar and are held during solstices and equinoxes.

Complex societies, too, with their political crises and wars of conquest and of deliverance, establish feasts of victory, of veneration for great leaders, and of thanksgiving. In all major religions, feast days, dedicated to great leaders, are outstandingly characteristic.

---

[6] van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 178-180.

As humans we move in the world of ordinary and extraordinary, between the world of purity and pollution. The holy and the unholy things acquire a mystic potency, a magico-spiritual power that was an expression of man's limitedness and inadequacy. Moreover, sanctity was attached to the chief or ruler, as in Egypt, where the Pharaoh was revered and worshipped. It was believed that from them emanated at particular times special influences upon the people. Hence, it became superlatively imperative for one's welfare to observe times and rituals when the gods were most favourably disposed, for the power that blessed could also inflict a curse. Days consecrated to the deity became days of concentration upon him; hence, distracting labour was forbidden. Abstinence from work was itself a rite of reverence. Priestly supervision accented these attitudes. For example, in the post-exilic calendar among the Hebrews, the Day of First Fruits which opened the Feast of Weeks was a time of "holy convocation," when no work was permitted (Lev 23:21; Num 28:26). Among the simple cultures there was also a rite of sacramental eating preliminary to the general use of the harvest. In more advanced cultures this rite developed into act of sacrificing a portion of the first fruits to the God, thereby honouring him and expressing thanksgiving for a good harvest and thereby, also, soliciting his aid against the Evil who caused poor harvests. Therefore, the rite often was preceded by ceremonial cleansing or purgation and was accompanied by tasting and continence.

Religious festivals illustrate the importance of the social factor in religious experience. Religious festivals include enormous gatherings. The largest festival in the world, the Maha Kumbha Mela of India, is held every twelve years, timed to take place at an auspicious position of the planet Jupiter. The Maha Kumbha Mela draws 15 million participants to the banks of the River Ganges. Ascetic holy men abound, seeking the opportunity to cleanse themselves from sin by bathing at the auspicious moment, thereby obtaining merit.

The major world pilgrimages also include massive festival occasions, such as Guadalupe Day (December 12), near Mexico City, where the Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, this festival is the most heavily attended Christian pilgrimage in the world, attracting more than 5 million pilgrims a year. Other religious festivals take the form of passion plays. Another type of religious festival primarily takes the form of a public procession

a. The World View of Hindu Feasts and Festivals

Writing on the "Hindu Fasts, Festivals and Holy Days," Monier Williams observes: "No country upon earth rejoices in a longer list of holidays, festivals (*utsava*) and seasons of rejoicing, qualified by fasts (*upavasa, vrata*), vigils (*jagarana*), and seasons of mortification, than India. Most of these fasts and festivals are fixed to take place on certain lunar days (*tithi*)."[7]

Thus, many of the Hindu feasts and festivals are related to celestial phenomena like the new moon and full moon playing an important role. Full moon and new moon sacrifices were extensively performed in ancient India. Later, many full moon and new moon days were associated with festivals. Eclipses also attracted widespread attention in India. In fact, diurnal phenomena like dawn, sunrise, mid-day and sunset have been marked as auspicious for prayer.

These religious attitudes are popularly known as "Cosmic Religions" in contrast to meta-cosmic soteriologies. Cosmic religion refers to human attitude to the mysteries of life that are in some way related to the cosmic forces, which we need and yet fear. These forces also serve as "ambivalent symbols of our own subconscious forces."[8]

According to Monier Williams, the Hindu celebrations are related to sanctity of certain moments and periods of time by association with memorable events, holy persons, and notable psychic experiences. This is the basic idea underlying the observance of sacred days and festivals, as well as the undertaking of pilgrimages to places considered especially sacred.

---

[7] Monier Williams, *Hinduism*, New York: Macmillan & Co., 1919, 248.

[8] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, London: Fontana, 1971, 69.

> There is not an object in heaven and earth which a Hindu is not prepared to worship – sun, moon, and stars; rocks, stocks, and stones; trees, shrubs, and grass; seas, pools, and rivers; his own implements of trade; the animals he finds most useful; the noxious reptiles he fears; men remarkable for extraordinary qualities, viz., great valour, sanctity, virtue, or even vice; good and evil demons, ghosts, and goblins; the spirits of departed ancestors; an infinite number of semi-human and semi-divine existences; inhabitants of the seven upper and the seven lower worlds – each and all come in for a share of divine honour or a tribute of more or less adoration.[9]

b. The World View of Hebrew and Christian Feasts and Festivals

As Semites the ancient Hebrews shared many of the beliefs and practices of their race. With an original Chaldean background and later several centuries of exposure to Egyptian culture it was inevitable that they would absorb many of the customs of the people with whom they had close contacts. The early Hebrew feasts and festivals combined the lunar and the agricultural types. Many of their ancient festivals were those of the new moon. After they had adopted an agricultural way of life in their Palestinian homeland, they established feasts that reflected their new interests, but they were essentially nature festivals. There can be no doubt that the Hebrew holy days were derived from Babylonian and Egyptian sources. When Jerusalem became the capital the festivals in this city were reduced and refined. Toward the end of the monarchy when the Hebrews indulged in astrology, divination and the worship of heavenly bodies, prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah came up heavily on the worship of nature. They challenged the Hebrews to worship the Creator God who is the Master of Nature. Gradually, the agricultural and lunar festivals of the Hebrews lost their naturalistic character and acquired meanings and rituals that set them apart from gentile observances.

The Christian feasts and festivals also concentrate on God the Creator and his redemptive act in the history of humankind in Jesus Christ. St. Augustine exhorted the Christians to celebrate the Nativity, not like the heathen on account of the birth of the sun, but on account of him who made the sun.

---

[9] Monier Williams, cited in *Festivals in India*, Special Volume of *Vivekananda Kendra Patrika*, 6,1 (February 1977), 24.

Although Sunday may be regarded as the principal Christian holy day, Easter is the central and pivotal festival of Christianity, not only because of its commemoration of the Resurrection, but also because a number of other feasts are related to and are dependent upon it for their dates. The Catholic and Episcopalian ecclesiastical calendars also commemorate the lives of Christian saints.

6. Dialogue in Feasts and Festivals

Though feasts and festivals are born in a natural setting of the change of seasons, rites of passage, religious, civic and political contexts, the interpretation and the meaning of life to these natural occurrences are given from the world-view of a particular community. For example, the Judeo-Christian world-view interprets the natural occurrences in terms of the Creator God who is the Lord of Nature. Hence, worship is due only to God not to nature. Many other religions, on the other hand, including Hinduism, do not consider it anything wrong to worship the nature in their feasts and festivals. Precisely this difference in Judeo-Christian religions is attributed to the ecological crisis and the process of secularisation in the modern world of today. Is it true that Judeo-Christian religions are minimizing the importance of ecology? We require a dialogue here. Similarly, does Hinduism promote worship of nature through their feasts and festivals with less importance to God, the Creator of nature? This also requires an exploration in dialogue. Could we learn from each other while being faithful to our religious traditions? What are the similarities and differences between cosmic religious traditions and meta-cosmic ones? Could it be possible to integrate these traditions without abandoning one's own? All the above queries require much reflection and dialogue in mutual understanding and respect.

There is another area in which the Christians in India need to study the religious celebrations of the Hindus deeply. The observation of Monier Williams gives a challenge to Indian Christians to be deeply rooted in their Christian faith as well as in their ancient traditions. Writing on the "Hindu Fasts, Festivals, and Holy Days," he maintains: "And first, with regard to the general custom of fasting, it may be worthwhile to point out that no Christian man – be he Roman Catholic or Anglican – not even the most austere stickler for the most strict observance of every appointed period of humiliation and abstinence, can for a moment hope to compete with any religious native of India – Hindu or Muhammadan – who may have entered on a course of fasting, abstinence and bodily maceration."[10] This comparison of Monier Williams gives the Indian Christians a challenge to be authentically Christian and authentically Indian by deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and incorporating the age-old spiritual practices of fasting, abstinence and bodily maceration in their Indian Christian life. Dialogue needs to be operative and effective in this direction too.

7. Conclusion

Feast and festivals are essential aspects of every culture and religion. They are the experiential dimensions of life. They are the celebrations of life and death. They are influenced by the ecological, historical and ideological factors. All these experiences of life have been interpreted and re-interpreted according to the world-view of a community. The world-views of Hindu and Christian traditions tend to emphasize two different aspects of human experience. While, Hindu feasts and festivals are highly rooted in the rhythm of nature, the Christian festivals emphasize the Creator of this nature and concentrate on his saving mission. The natural phenomena are subordinated to the power of God in Judeo-Christian religions. Dialogue requires understanding all these dimensions and incorporating whatever is good and noble in cultures, which will give and enhance life, a life in abundance.

---

[10] Monier Williams, cited in *Festivals in India*, 24.

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 377-384

FESTIVALS
AS THE MYTHICAL LANGUAGE OF SELF-TRANSFORMATIVE HISTORY

Ignatius Jesudasan◆

The above title represents and is a thesis. In academic circles, which deal with hypotheses, proof is a methodological law and necessity. Academics, therefore, expect and demand proofs for every thesis as well. But not every thesis needs a proof. Nor can theses be proved in a strict logical sense, because most theses are statements of facts. After all, facts cannot be proved any further. They can only be shown or demonstrated as facts for observers to see and hear for themselves. The above thesis is one such a statement of facts. Therefore, I do not attempt to prove it. Instead, I simply point to experience and call upon the reader to see it for himself or herself by looking into his or her own experience of participation in the festivals of his or her own community, even as I do by looking into myself, in my participation in one major festival celebration of my community. In this process, I try also to clarify the different concepts, which are being employed in this discourse.

As the great scholars in the study of religious language, such as Carl Jung, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell and Paul Ricoeur, have shown us, dreams and rituals belong to the symbolic world and language of myth. We know that, of their periodically and rhythmically repetitive nature, festivals belong to and with the remembrance or recitation of cyclical myths. But the one thing, which we may not know or recognize, perhaps, is the intentionally self-transformative nature, function, dynamics and purpose of myth, which accounts for its repetitiveness. Hence, I shall focus on why festivals are repetitive, without becoming on that score a meaningless ritual. I shall also try to show how what I have termed mythical language effects a self-transformation.

◆**Ignatius Jesudasan**, an Indian Jesuit, is a faculty at Arulkadal, a regional theologate in Chennai, TN, and regularly contributes his rich and reflective articles to many Indian and International journals.

I presuppose, and I trust the reader will agree with me, that rituals and festivals are a form of action-language, and symbolic like every other form, which language takes. Hence, festivals are also a symbolic form of language, and, therefore, also symbolically meaningful. The thrust of this essay is to try to demonstrate this symbolic meaningfulness of festivals. But symbolism itself would need to be clarified in terms of language.

Language is structured as word or communication between speakers and hearers, and about the speakers and hearers, or their inter-relationships through and in the intermediation of third parties or objects. Speakers are the subjects of language; hearers are the objects of language. Speaking subjects are in the first person, and the hearing subjects in the proximate, face-to-face second, and the remote or absent subjects or objects become, and are reasonably assigned the position of the third person. Not only is language structured as communication between subjects and objects, but also as communication across different chronological or experiential historical timeframes. The speakers and hearers are not all and always of the same age and experience or knowledge level. Society always consists of people of differing ages, experience and skills. The elders have a past, which the children do not have. The children have a future, which the elders do not have either. In these social terms, then, language consists of the mutual fusion of the older and the younger generations into each other's timeframe of the past and the future. Therefore, language is essentially and functionally historical, set in a timeframe of movement, here and now, from the past into the future.

Symbols are creative and created products of intelligent and intellectual beings like us human beings. To create or make a symbol is basically to create language. It is in and through language that we are able to communicate symbolically. We are in a position to do this unlike the animals, because we are able to differentiate individual and class or group, where an individual or a part becomes for us the symbol or specimen, representative of the whole class or species. A symbol is one thing, which stands for or represents another. It is one meaning carrying also a second or third and fourth layer of meaning. Symbol has connotation of multi-layered meanings, associations and thoughts. Whatever in a symbol stands for an identity. Identity is a quality of uniqueness in number or quantity. All words are basically symbols. This is how words are able to identify and stand for individuals and groups of beings or realities. This is the meaning of being a noun or substantive. It is by standing for or denoting the particular individuals and groups that words symbolize or identify them. They are the symbols of those individualities and groups.

Festivals are a mythical language of symbolic words. Most *words* at festivals are, and consist really of repetitive and ritualistic actions, related to mythical history, which is myth with a history-making élan and purpose. We shall come to the why of it by first considering the how of festivals, by way of observation of what happens at festivals. Festivals are festive or celebrative actions and occasions. Celebrations themselves are acts of recollection or remembrance of events, experiences and relationships of and to persons from one's (ancestral) past. As such, the celebrants establish and affirm or reaffirm and reestablish continuity with the past of their own origin or history in the celebration itself. Thus, celebration is and becomes a social pedagogy in the history of a group's collective identity, serving to integrate the celebrating persons into that historically continuing social identity. Historical remembrance is an important function and purpose of festivals as celebrations. It is psychologically through knowledge or remembrance of one's roots or origin that one knows and identifies oneself for who one is and where one socially belongs, namely, to and through such affinities as family, kinship, clan, caste, social location, race, language, culture, religion, nation, etc.

Festivals become festive or celebrative in three ways: 1) by halting from normal work; 2) by assembling and being together with the rest of one's family, kin, clan, caste, race, language, religion or nation in the common ritual function or action; 3) by making merry and rejoicing with special, new or unusual items of food and clothing and other related forms of fun and entertainment.

Repetitive work generally tends to narrow one's consciousness and vision, thereby also one's creative energy into a mechanically thoughtless and slavishly dull and numbing drudgery of boredom and meaninglessness. By breaking this drudgery and monotony, festivals become occasions of recovery and recuperation from the drudgery, making the normal work more personally and socially directed, meaningful and purposive. It is by being or coming together with family, kin, clan, caste, parish, location, language or religion that one recovers the faith, sense or meaningfulness of belonging to and identity with one's community even in and for the work itself. The merry making in food, drinks, dress, sport, music, dance, drama and ritual or worship brings and adds pleasure to the joy of cessation from work and to the joy of social solidarity. It makes the social identity or belonging and the occasion of its celebration a joy to remember and look forward to the next such occasion, in turn. The ritual or worshipping part of the festival expands the social identity or solidarity to the depth and height dimensions of and into the divinity itself, as its ultimate cause, guarantee and justification. Thus, festivals have and manifest the threefold economic, social and politico-religious dimensions of the celebration of identities, which are historical and history making.

The historic function of festivals is yet to be explained. We stated above that festivals celebrate the group's founding ancestors and their relationship to the group in and through the remembrance, which constitutes the festival. The remembrance itself is an acknowledgment of the personal-historical origin of one's social identity in group in thankful joy and determination to maintain and build it up further through loving solidarity with and among all the members of that group. This is what the celebration of historical remembrances of events of ancestral history effects and is supposed to bring about. Remembrance is a history-making power and faculty. It does it by creating or fostering a strong group identity-consciousness in historical perspective. Remembering a past which is no more the present, but making it vivid as though it were present, through ritual actions, makes of remembrance a sacrament of the presence of the absent ancestors, making them present in the remembering ones themselves. Physical ancestors are, indeed, present in their progeny through their physical genes,. which have been transmitted through successive psychosomatic generations. Spiritual ancestors are present, and made spiritually present in the celebrating group, through their significant word-signs spoken and performed by it in remembrance of them. This remembrance of the ancestors gives the remembering group the future-oriented thrust of determination to stand together in weal and woe, and in peace and war, as the characteristic of a continuing historicity. This is the socio-psychological and political process of how the apparently social or religious celebrations help to make collective or common group history, enabling tribal or ethnic identities to aspire and grow into national or state identities.

What we mean by the mythical quality of language and history is yet to be elucidated. Myth is the symbol or metaphor of the history-making subject. We have seen above that the history-making subject is the group, which celebrates the memory of its ancestors in festivals, and that the group's history is made precisely in the memorial recall itself, wherein the dead ancestors are made alive and present in and to the remembering group. Thus, remembrance has a mystical quality about it, of direct communion of the living and the dead in a continuous social and sacred history. I wager, therefore, to assert, at this point, the identity of both the mythical and the mystical in the history-making symbolic memorial. Myth expresses objectively what the subject experiences and is expected and enabled to experience subjectively, by virtue of the memory. It is either already in physical and spiritual communion with the dead ancestors, or else it is on the way to and in the process of such communion and identification with them and their spirit, through the very act and power of remembering them. To the extent it communes with them, it is transformed from within itself into the image and likeness of the ancestors. It is taken over, possessed and directed by the spirit of its ancestors, and is rendered a fit instrument to continue the kind of history they initiated. The extent, to which a group departs to make a different kind of history than its founding ancestors, is a measure of the change of paradigm it has adopted over against the paradigm of its own founding fathers. The way any festival is celebrated will also reflect the modifications, which have come over the group's understanding of its own paradigmatic models. The mythical quality of history then means that the kind of history that a group makes will reflect the kind of myth, as the pre-historic model or paradigm of the kind of history it seeks and wills to make.

Festival as mythical or self-transformative language remains to be explained, even though we have pointed to the transformation, which takes place in the act of remembering the clan or group ancestors. The explanation will consist of an elaboration of the symbol as an objective expression of the celebrating group or subject itself. Symbolic communication is the revelation of the essence of the speaker to the inner or spiritual essence of the hearer. It is an aesthetic-mystical pursuit at unifying and integrating the hearer with the speaker. The mythical-mystical speaker in the festival is the self-same remembered ancestor. The hearers are the very celebrating group itself. In doing the remembrance of its founding ancestor, the celebrating group is taught and reminded that its essence is the same as its founder's, and that, therefore, it is bound to, and capable of making a history like the very founder-ancestor. This is the symbolic-realistic communication or revelation of the festival. The act or way of remembering the ancestor is itself the sign and occasion of the strength and energy received to continue the ancestor's way of history further.

With this clarification, theoretically I have made a concisely sufficient explanation and exposition of the concepts of the thesis asserted in the title. It now remains for me only briefly to illustrate them with one example. As a Catholic priest and thinker, the obvious illustrative example, which comes to my mind in this connection, is that of the memorial of the death of the Lord, Jesus Christ, otherwise called the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass.

The Mass or the Eucharist is a ritual replay of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples on the night before he suffered death on the cross on Good Friday. The synoptic gospel writers and St. Paul speak of it as an act of remembrance commanded by Jesus himself. They speak of what Jesus did and said, when he commanded them to keep it in his memorial. When he had eaten the Jewish Passover meal with his disciples, which he knew was going to be his last meal with them, he took bread, gave thanks to God, broke it and gave it to them, saying, "Take and eat it all of you: for, this is my body which will be given up for you." Likewise he took the cup of wine, gave thanks to God and gave the cup to his disciples, saying, "Drink from this, all of you: this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for the forgiveness of sins of the many. Do this in remembrance of me."

The disciples understood only some time after his death that Jesus had anticipated that death in and through the signs of the bread and wine at his last supper. It was at such memorial meals, in which they recalled his person, words and deeds, that they experienced his coming and being present in and with them as their life-giving spiritual energy source, enabling them to stand every prison and persecution they were subjected to for his name's sake, even to the point of glorying and rejoicing in such suffering, as their own share in the cross of Christ. This is how they experienced themselves transformed by and into Jesus himself, and into his body as the Christ.

It was on the first Sunday following Good Friday, which was the third day from the day of his death, that the disciples had their first experience or vision of Jesus as risen from the dead. In memory of that Sunday, every Sunday in the year has been a holy day of remembrance and celebration in the Christian calendar, just to encourage and enable the believers to rest from their weekday work, and experience in the sacramental signs of bread and wine, their own inner communion with Jesus through their participation in the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ.

The sacramental symbolism of the Eucharist is created and constituted in and by an act of food and drink. This food, here, consists of bread, and the drink consists of wine. Bread is the life of the grain crushed into flour and kneaded and baked into a more easily edible and digestible form of food. Wine is the life of the vine and its grape crushed into juice and fermented into a soothing and smooth-going spirituous drink. In its form as bread, the grain is sown into its eater, to be digested, germinated and enabled to sprout and grow into a full-fledged plant, which will and is to yield an abundant harvest of many more grains. In its form as drink, the wine is poured like water into the stomach-field, to irrigate it and moisten the injected seed, enabling it spiritually to germinate, sprout and grow up to yielding a more manifold return of the life it has consumed and taken in. Thus, eating and drinking are not mere acts of consumption. They are acts of transformation of the consumed food and drink into the productive life of the consumer, arousing, reminding, calling upon and driving the consumer into a producer and supplier of food, becoming food, in turn, to many more other lives than he, she or it has lived upon. Thus, the life that became food sustains other lives and thereby lives vicariously in those who consume it.

This is the meaning of Jesus' own death. He lived and died for others, forgiving even the sins of those who had put him to death on the cross. In this he had revealed and witnessed to God as a forgiving Father of sinful humans, calling upon his believers also and enabling them to live and give their lives in the service of fellow humans, as their own brothers and sisters in him, through him and with him. That was to be the way they should remember Jesus, becoming his own body, moral-mystically true to the memorial of Jesus they celebrated in the sacred signs of bread and wine. Eating the body of flesh of Jesus in the signifying form of bread, and drinking the blood of Jesus in its signifying form of wine were symbols of the consumers' own transformation into the dynamic, life-giving and life-sustaining body and blood of Christ.

Together with the other sacraments, the Eucharist is a complete language of symbolic word and action by itself, with the mystical signification of communion with Jesus and reliving his life, to be mirrored in the moral striving towards compassionate and forgiving service to and in solidarity with all of one's weak and sinful fellow human beings. The Mass is repeated day after day, or Sunday after Sunday, Easter after Easter and Christmas after Christmas, in order to remind the believers that the task and the striving is towards nothing less than the fullness of God himself, and that this, despite all human effort, can find its fulfillment only in the fullness of God's own time. So the Christians are to continue their history of unrelenting striving in the joy of expectation and hope of God's own possibilities, which exceed all that humans can calculate, and will be manifested on the day of Christ's coming again in glory, to glorify with himself his disciples, who have learnt enough from him to be transformed into his own body.

Thus, Christian festivals have a past, present and future socio-historical reference in terms of a time of God's own grace and truth of salvation offered to humans and all fellow humans, integrating history into the eternal life and plan of the Godhead. Time and eternity, thus, meet and are reconciled in a mythical fashion in the Christian worldview. The moral imperative implied in this Christian vision is one of being reconciled to the world as it is, by taking suffering prophetically the sin of the world and its consequences on oneself without a sense of victimization, but rather in the spirit of triumphant optimism, faith, love and forgiveness, thereby, creatively enabling a new and sinless world of human solidarity to emerge under God, as the children of God's own family.

Journal of Dharma 28, 3 (July-September 2003), 385-393

RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF HINDU FESTIVALS

P. L. Santhakumari♦

1. Introduction

In India, religious festivals play a significant role of exalting and integrating man to higher levels of experience. The Indian religion is termed 'Hinduism' or "Hindu Religions Tradition." It is based on Vedas. Hence, it is more correct to refer Hindu religion as "*vaidika-dharma*" or "*sanatana-dharma*" (eternal religion).[1] The distinguishing feature of *sanatana dharma* is that it is more a name for the cultural tradition of Hindus than exclusively for their beliefs, which are narrowly religious and sectarian. In it there is an organic relation between religious ideals and social practices. This organic relationship is expressed through the fact that all forms of life – social, political, and aesthetic have a religious touch (to Gandhi, for instance, even the struggle of Indians in South Africa was a struggle for religious liberty). Hence, we see that one of the functions of religions is to sanctify the ways of society and make it a part of the sacred tradition by various religious as well as social observances.

♦**Dr. P. L. Santhakumari** is a lecturer in philosophy at the University College, Thiruvanandapuram, Kerala.

[1] Vivekananda explains the word 'Hindu' thus: This word Hindu was the name that the ancient Persians used to apply to the river Sindhu. Whenever in Sanskrit there is an 'S' in ancient Persian it changes into 'H', so that 'Sindhu' becomes 'Hindu'. Now this word 'Hindu' as applied to the inhabitants of the other side of the Indus, whatever might have been its meaning in ancient times, has lost all its force in modern times; for all the people that live on this side of Indus no longer belong to one religion. There are the Hindus proper, the Mohammedans, the Parsees, the Christians, the Buddhists and Jains. The word 'Hindu' in its literal sense ought to include all these; but as signifying the religion, it would not be proper to call these Hindus. It is very hard, therefore, to find any common name for our religions, of various ideas of various ceremonials and forms, all gathered together almost without a name, and without a church, and without an organization. The only point where, perhaps, all these sects agree is that we all believe in the scriptures – the Vedas. *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, Culcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1976, 215.

2. Hinduism and Its Efficacy

Aurobindo explains clearly the efficacy of religion. He makes a distinction between two aspects of religion, they being true religion and religionism. True religion, according to him, is Spiritual Religion, which is beyond the intellectual, moral, aesthetic and practical nature of man. It exhorts man to live in spirit. On the other hand, religionism is narrow devotion and exaltation. To quote the words of Aurobindo,

> True religion is Spiritual Religion that which seeks to live in the spirit, in what is beyond the intellect, beyond the aesthetic and practical being of man and to inform and govern these members of our being by the higher light and law of the spirit. Religionism, on the contrary, entrenches itself in narrow pietistic exaltation of the lower members, or lays exclusive stress on intellectual dogmas, form and ceremonies, on some fixed and rigid moral code, on some religio-political or religio-social system.[2]

But religious symbols, ceremonies, moral codes and social systems are not negligible. Human beings need them. The lower members are to be exalted and refined before they can be spiritualised. These ceremonies and festivals help the ordinary man to feel the spirit and obey its laws. The thinking man needs an intellectual formula, the aesthetic temperament of man needs a ceremony and the vital nature of man requires a set of moral codes for fulfilment. The only thing is that they belong to the rational or infra-rational part of man. They are mere aids or supports for spiritualization of man.

In India, religion or *sanatana dharma* has an integral outlook. It teaches the oneness or reality or existence (*ekam-sat*). The Rgveda teaches, "That which exists is one: sages call it by various names" (*ekam sat: viprah bahudha vadanti*). *Sanatana dharma* emphases that not only all gods and goddesses and living beings but also the whole universe is a manifestation of the one divine reality. The special feature of this religious tradition is that it is based on *Sruti*, *Yukti* and *Svanubhuti*. Its teachings are revealed truths (*sruti*) discovered by rsis in harmony with reason (*yukti*) and continually confirmed by direct experience

---

[2] Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle: The Ideal of Human Unity War and Self-Determination*, Pondicherry: Sri. Aurobindo Ashram, 1970, 166; hereinafter referred to as *Human Cycle*.

(*aparokshanubhuti*) or rsis, sages and saints. It is open to all competent persons. This religious tradition stands unrivalled in the depth and splendour of its philosophy and is the oldest of all religions.

Dharma is defined as "that which supports, that which holds together the peoples of the universe."[3] Dharma is not a set of beliefs having no necessary connection with the daily life of humanity. But it is a set of principles of healthy and prosperous life. To know these principles and to live and act upon them is to become a true Aryan or a follower of *vaidika dharma*. The etymological meaning of religion is also the same, "that which binds together."

Religion binds us by rules and laws and saves us from regression. Yogananda Paramahamsa observes: "Religion binds us by rules, laws and injunctions in order that we may not degenerate, that we may not be in misery – bodily, mentally and spiritually."[4] Thus, religion seems to have two functions: negative and positive. .Negatively, it consists in the avoidance of pain, misery and sufferings. Positively, it enables the individual to attain peace of mind and bliss. Gandhi holds the same view. According to him, religion is that "which changes one's nature and which binds one to the truth within, and which ever purifies."[5] Along this line Aurobindo asserts that the regulating and harmonising principle of life is to be discovered in religion. He points out the inadequacy of reason and culture as the directing principles of man. Thus, he says that "to make all life religious and to govern all activities by the religious idea would seem to be the right way to the development of the ideal individual and ideal society and lifting of the whole man into the Divine."[6]

3. Dimension of Religious Integration

The Hindu religions culture is composite and pluralistic in nature. It retains within one fold many types of religions perceptions and insights. The religious scriptures exhort that the purpose of religion is integration of man with God, the creator of the world. This integration takes place through different levels – social, individual, and cosmic. Man has to realize his oneness with nature and fellow creations. This gradually results in the awareness of his oneness with God, the Indweller, and, finally, leads to cosmic integration. In this context it is relevant to quote the words of Pratima Bowes:

---

[3] *Dharanath dharma ithyahu dharmo dharayiti praja. Mahabharata,* Karnaparva, 69.59.

[4] Yogananda Paramahamsa, *Science and Religion*, Calcutta: Yogoda Satsanga Society of India, 2000, 13.

[5] M. K. Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Madras, 1992, 807.

[6] Aurobindo, *Human Cycle*, 162.

> The human need for integration with religious reality operates on three different levels and in two different dimensions. Three levels are cosmic, social and individual; three planes of existence to which man can believe himself to belong, and the dimensions are the temporal and the timeless, that is, the here and now values of every day life, such as are involved in the practice of polytheism, and eternal values embodied in the quest for immortality such as we find in monotheism and monism.[7]

At the cosmic level the individual has to be integrated with all existence. The whole world with its living and non-living creations is seen to be the expression of one eternal principle, Brahman. "Verity, this self is the overlord of all things, the king of all things. As all the spokes are held together in the hub and felly of a wheel, just so in this self, all things, all gods and worlds, all breathing things, all these selves are held together."[8]

In Hindu religion, the search for integration operates in another level also. The manifold powers of nature are conceived as divine and are being worshipped. Here man recognizes his unity with nature through worship and adoration of natural forces. Rivers, mountains, trees and animals are worshipped as sacred. At this level, man does not transcend his finitude but remains satisfied by the favours that come to him from the natural forces. The polytheistic gods are worshipped for health, wealth, success and prosperity in life. For instance, we see that in Hindu religion Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth is worshipped for material prosperity. Collectively done, it is more a celebration and a good thing for all to enjoy rather than an expression of selfish desire.

There is another dimension of the search for the sacred, which is stimulated by man's social existence. This is expressed through belief and practice. The *Purusha Sukta* of Rgveda teaches that man's social existence, its division into four categories (*varna*) and their functions, is not just a convenience but a divine self-expression, and, therefore, sacred. It also emphasizes that human family and society here on earth are copies of the divine family and society in heaven. Father Sky and Mother Earth are the parents of both men and gods of whom there are several groups. Rituals, ceremonies, communal prayers and festivals also belong to this dimension or approach. They bind the members of the community. This is the social function of religious festivals as they integrate individual in the social plane. The rites and ceremonies connected with birth, death and marriage have another function in sanctifying and giving it a religious touch. These can unite people more closely than any other social occasion.

---

[7] Pratima Bowes, *The Hindu Religions Tradition: A Philosophical Approach,* Bombay: Allied Publishers Private Limited, 1976, 86-87.

[8] *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 11.5.15.

Public religious ceremonies connected with religious festivals have another function. They bring collective enjoyment to people. There is a lot of merry-making and rejoicing. People of all communities participate in the cultural activities. These seem to have a double function. The participants get a chance for the expression of their creative talents and also to cultivate a deeper bond between them and onlookers. This naturally paves the way for social unity, tolerance, harmony and peace. This is a vital social function of religious festivals.

It is to be noted that the Hindu tradition or *sanatana dharma* has not any organized clergy. The Hindu priests have no institutional status or any organized institution through which people can be integrated in the social sphere. This purpose is served through religions rituals and festivals. An examination of some important religious festivals will reveal these ideas clearly. Durga Puja, Dussehra and Deepavali are three important festivals.

4. Durga Puja

Durga Puja or *Navaratri* is celebrated all over in India. This festival is important not only for its social appeal but also for its spiritual significance. There are three main ideals underlying the worship of Sakti or Mother Durga. (a) Mother Durga symbolizes the source, repository and sum total of all powers. From the lowest crawling amoeba to the galaxies in the outer space there is only one source of energy. (b) The source of power does not discriminate between good and evil. (c) It is inseparable from Brahman (Universal Soul) but it is sentient and manifest to its worshipper. She is Sakti, the power of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara.

She takes the form of their consorts, without whom none of the Gods can achieve anything.

The rituals of *Durga Puja* starts with the construction of the clay image of Durga Devi for worship on Janmashtami, the day Devi is born to Yasoda, Krishna's foster-mother. The actual worship is held during the bright lunar fortnight of the month of Aswina (October). The worship begins with the establishment of a specially designed or decorated jar (*ghata*) on a specified altar. The deity is then ritually awakened and invited to appear first in a Bilva tree, and, subsequently, in the image with offerings of various articles. Next, she is formally invoked in the image, which is worshipped in each of the following three days along with associated deities. The use of a variety of articles from gold to cow dung symbolizes her universal presence. The deity is also given a very elaborate bath (*mahasnana*). Water collected from rivers all over India, various juices, other liquids, and soil obtained from a variety of places are used for this purpose. This is symbolic of unity of land. A sheaf of nine shoots (*navapartika*) representing Devi's manifestation in the plant kingdom is kept beside the image and elaborately worshipped. The Kumari Puja acknowledges the Divine Mother's presence in all women. At the 48 minute long junction of the *ashtami* and *navamy thithi* (day), Devi is worshipped in her terrible aspect of *Camundi*. This worship is known as *Santi Puja*. On the *navamithithi*, the worshipper surrenders himself to Devi through a sacrificial cutting of pumpkins, bananas, etc. This is *balidana*. The priest performs *homa* with offerings in a fire representing Durga. The *puja* concludes on the *ashtami thithi* with the immersion of the image in a river symbolizing Devi's reversion to her elemental forms, and her spirit is enshrined in the heart of the worshipper. The devotees then exchange greetings and sweets. The entire ritual is replete with symbolism. It s accompanied by devotional singing, chanting of *Devi Mahatmya*, daily *arati* in the evenings and distribution of *prasada*. All these create a joyous atmosphere and the devotees are imbued with the feeling of presence of Divine Mother.

The Spiritual significance of *Durga Puja* is that the only dedicated and energetic are likely to succeed in work. Men are able to control animal passions only by Mother's grace. The worship of Divine Mother with *navapatrika* is likely to produce great agricultural wealth. All the accessory rituals aim at concentration of mind. The significance of

Kumari Puja is in that it inspires men to look all women as manifestation of the Divine Mother. Women are to evince the dignity and power associated with the Divine Mother. Ultimately, all these practices and attitutdes help to realize one's identity with Divine Motherhood within oneself, which, in fact, is inherent in all beings.[9]

5. Dussehra

The tenth day of *Durga Puja* is Dussehra. It is believed that on this day, in the *Treta Yuga*, Sri Rama, the seventh incarnation of Vishnu, killed the great demon Ravana who abducted Rama's wife, Sita, to his kingdom of Lanka. Sri Rama along with his brother Lakshmana and the devoted follower Hanuman and his army of monkey's fought a great battle to rescue Sita. The battle lasted for 10 days. Rama was a great devotee of goddess Durga and he prayed her for 9 days before he himself entered the battlefield. On this day Rama killed Ravana, Meghanada and Kumbhakarna. The story of Rama and Sita is recounted with affection and love in the great epic *Ramayana*. The whole of *Ramayana* is enacted in dramas staged in huge *pandals* and maidens in cities, towns and villages. Beautiful tableaux of actors in costumes of ancient times are taken around the city. These tableaux and enactments are known as *Ramleela*. The young and the old alike enjoy this big *mela*. In Bengal, this occasion is celebrated as the day on which Durga Devi killed the terrible demon, Mahishasura. On Dussehra all articles that are used for progress and prosperity of mankind are worshipped. All vehicles – cars, trucks, buses, etc. are worshipped by individuals using them. In army, police and para-military organizations, the drivers clean and polish their vehicles with great solemnity and patience.

6. Deepavali

The Deepavali is one of the biggest and grandest celebrations in India. It is also known as the Festival of Lights. It comes exactly 20 days after Dussehra on Amavasi (new moon). It is believed that on this day Lord Rama along with his lovely wife, Sita, brother Lakshmana returned to Ayodhya after the exile of 15 years. The evildoer Ravana has been eliminated. To commemorate the return of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana to Ayodhya people celebrate Deepavali with the bursting of crackers and lighting up their houses with earthen lights or other lamps in the grandest style. Thousands of years have passed and yet the ideal kingdom of Rama (*Rama Rajya*) is remembered on this day.

---

[9] *Ya devi surva bhuthesu, matru rupena samsthita.*

On the Deepavali day a morning bath is very essential. In South India to bathe before sunrise after a good oil massage is considered as very auspicious. In North India gambling is freely allowed during the festival. Usually, card games are allowed. The children are also given money to play and join the fun. People drop in with sweets and crackers and other presents. Some visit the elders of the family and community out of respect. On this day, business people also give presents to those working for them. The businessmen do *Lakshmi Puja* in their shops and offices. It is believed that Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, visits very one during Deepavali.

7. Car Festival

Car festival (*Ratha Yatra*) held on the second day of the bright fortnight in Asada (June-July) every year. Puri in Orissa is the abode of Lord Jaganatha. It is believed that by seeing Lord Jaganatha in his chariot Nandighoṣa, one is freed from rebirths. For ages, Jaganatha is attracting devotees from distant places.

The legend part of it is this: Lord Jaganatha, along with his elder brother Balabhadra and Sister Subhadra – all riding on separate chariots – visit Gundica Grha, the house of Gundica – situated about three and a half kilometres away to the north west of Jaganatha temple. Gundica's house was the place where the images were made. Therefore, car festival or the sojourn of the Lord to Gundica's house is considered to be Lord's homecoming to have a free chat with his kinsmen away from the busy schedule of temples. Three wooden chariots are made every year. Nandighosa, the chariot of Lord Jaganatha, is covered by red and yellow clothes. Taladhvaja, the chariot of Balabhadra is decorated with red and green clothes. Devadalana, the chariot of Subhadra Devi is decorated with red and black clothes. Balabhadra who is fair in complexion represents the white people of western world. Subhadra Devi who by her yellow colour symbolizes the yellow people like those of China, Japan Korea, etc. Jaganatha, the black-god symbolizes the swarthy races all over the globe, including Indians. Tracing the historicity of *Ratha Yatra* is a bit difficult. However, it is ascertained that Lord Jaganatha continues to be the centre, around whom the integrity, culture, spiritual life and socio-economic life of Orissa revolve. This car festival helps to cultivate universal harmony as it makes all faiths come closer physically, psychologically and culturally. This makes the excellent job of creating human equality.

8. Conclusion

It is a notable feature of Hindu religious tradition that it stands for the whole way of life of people. The problem of the nature of ultimate reality, the manifestation of reality in all aspects of life, the ways and means of integration with reality are found discussed in it. It has a liberal and tolerant attitude towards all other religions. In it the devotees enjoy the freedom to choose one's own path to perfection. Those who aspire for higher spiritual experience can follow and practice the clear-cut paths enunciated in it. Those who have not reached the heights of wisdom but aspire for higher and nobler life can choose paths suited to their own temperaments. The religious ceremonies and festivals are recognized for men in the lower level of religious experience. They tend to unite people for common purpose of worship. The rites and rituals associated with the religious festivals help to accentuate concentration on the deity worshiped. This, gradually, leads to steadiness of mind, inner purification and refinement. The members of all communities, irrespective of caste and creed, come together, unite and experience the thrill and joy. They forget their differences, worries and tensions and find fulfilment in their religious and aesthetic temperaments. The Divine presence is experienced though for a short while. This results in social cohesion and integration. This social integration leads to individual integration, and, finally, results in cosmic integration. Thus, in and through the rites and rituals in connection with the feasts and festivals, an individual is refined mentally, morally and spiritually.

BOOK REVIEWS

David Cheetham, ***John Hick: A Critical Introduction and Reflection*****,** Hampshire: Ashgate, 2003, pages viii + 189, ISBN: 0-7546-1599-5.

The book offers a very clear and comprehensive introduction to John Hick's philosophy of religion and its evolution. Hick has made some creative contributions in this filed by his concepts such as "experiencing as," "epistemic distance," "eschatological verification," "Irenaean theodicy," "the Real," etc. David Cheetham in this book interestingly follows Hick's journey from the evangelical student to the controversial pluralist '*guru*'. The author shows that Hick has maintained the foundational aspects of his thought throughout the journey. They include his views of religious belief in the context of "experiencing as," the Irenaean intuition of a soul-making universe, and affirmation of a life beyond death. The author begins, just like Hick, with the problems of religious language and ends where the latter has arrived, namely, with the questions of religious plurality. Apart from the Introduction (1-8), the book contains five chapters dealing with the following five themes respectively, "Faith and Knowledge," "Evil and Soul-making," "Death and Eternal Life," "The Universe of faiths," and "Religious Pluralism." Then we have a postscript of three pages, a bibliography, and an index. The Introduction provides a brief biography as well as an overall picture of Hick's works.

The introduction begins with the observation that "history will probably judge John Hick to be one of the great philosophers of religion of the twentieth century" (1). This statement can be well accepted. But the author's question at the very start of the paragraph that speaks about Hick's works seems to be surprising. He asks: "What is John Hick's theological position?" (4). Cheetham immediately observes, "This is not that easy to answer." Taking into account the nature of Hick's works, it seems that the very question itself about the theological quality is out of place. Cheetham himself might have not meant it in the strict sense. The overall impression about Hick's works is that they are not of *theological* nature, for he is not operating with theological tools, but purely philosophical ones. One does not find Hick basing his reflections or arguments on revelation, faith or Church teaching. According to Cheetham, the reason for the difficulty in answering the above question lies in the fact that Hick's "work extends over almost half a century and is contained in well over twenty authored and edited books" (4). Then the author continues: "In the earlier part of his career it would have seemed accurate to describe him as a fairly orthodox Christian philosopher." But later "we see an increasing broadening out of his worldview and an embracing of a pluralistic outlook." Hick remains a philosopher, though not a typically Christian one, as he used to be earlier. As a philosopher, however, he is profound and deserves to be considered seriously and appreciated. The author in chapter one on "Faith and Knowledge" confirms our view about the nature of Hick's works in his opening sentence where he characterizes Hick as a profound philosopher who began his philosophical career by concerning himself with epistemology (8). The author shows that experience is an important starting point for Hick. His orientation is, hence, better characterized as empiricist; he emphasizes the evidence of the senses and experience. Hick characterizes all experiences as "experiencing-as." Here he makes very valid and interesting observations and conclusions. He rightly observes that the amount of freedom we have in respect to interpreting our world varies in proportion to the sphere in which we operate. At the level of everyday sense experience it is most restricted and at the level of faith or religious experience the freedom is very broad. A positive and valid contribution of Hick by way of an apology of religious experience is that religious belief is not a special case requiring separate justification (12). Cheetham skilfully treats this point elaborately in the pages that follow. There he lucidly deals with the questions of realism and non-realism as well as the questions raised by logical positivism, verification and falsification, and how Hick counters the demands of the logical positivists by employing the principle of eschatological verification (30ff.). It is to be credited to Hick that he defends against A. Flew on his own terms that religious statements have *cognitive dignity* (27-31).

Chapter two deals with the problem of evil and an attempted theodicy. Cheetham illustrates the affinity of Hick's theodicy to that of the church father Irenaeus for whom the creation was not perfect in the beginning, but was to grow into perfection. Hick rejects the Augustinian notion of an initial perfect world as inconsistent with the fact of man misusing his freedom and evil as its consequence (41-42). Hick adopts the basic Irenaean ideas about man in the image and likeness and his notion of evil and suffering as remedial rather than punitive. He, thus, speaks of "divine purpose to bring a limitlessly good outcome from the evil that has been weaved into the ways things are" (42). Soul making is the intention behind it all. This is a "process of transforming human animals into children of God" (43), which cannot be achieved in this lifetime. Extending the human journey beyond death is, therefore, essential for this kind of theodicy to make sense. Hick is, thus, committed to the idea of a life after or beyond death. But one does not understand why he should hold the idea of universal salvation. Although one may *hope* for this, one has no reason to affirm with certainty that all will be saved. How such a theory takes human freedom seriously, is not clear. This makes one wonder how and why Cheetham could not find here any logical difficulty in defending Hick's way of thinking (43). The author also tries to answer some objections raised against Hick's position (59ff.).

As Cheetham rightly observes, Hick's greatest contribution is his philosophy of religious pluralism. Now the question is, to what it has contributed. Definitely to a theology of pluralism, as opposed to what is called exclusivism and inclusivism. Chapter five is devoted to this crucial theme as represented by Hick. He considers all religions as human responses to some sort of a higher reality. Hence, they are for him equally veridical responses. For God he uses the term "the Real," which is a transcategorial expression. That God is understood in all the religions as a transcategorial reality is self-evident. Why should one use a new transcategorial term for God, rather than 'God' itself, is not made clear either. It is also not shown in which sense is the new term more transcategorial or for what reason the term 'God' is not as transcategorial as that term, or not transcategorial at all. If the term 'God' is not transcategorial, then the term "the Real" is also not so. There is, in fact, no special advantage for this new term over the old term 'God'. It is also not evident, how Hick has made a Copernican revolution in *theology*, by substituting Christianity with God at the centre. This revolution could be thought of as affecting the thinking of only those who might have placed Christianity at the centre as regards salvation. But there was no authentic Christian understanding of salvation in such terms. Pope Clemens XI condemned in 1713 the teaching of P. Quesnel who taught that there was no grace outside the Church (DS 2429). In 1949 the Holy Office condemned the "Boston heresy" of L. Feeney, according to whom all who did not join the Church would be damned to hell (ND 855, 856). One may now point out to the much-quoted axiom of Cyprian and Origen "outside the church, no salvation." One should not forget the special historical setting of this axiom. The axiom was formulated against the background of a schism. They were not referring in that case to the non-Christians, but to the Christians who were separating themselves from the Church. As in every case, so too in the case of this axiom, fairness and academic honesty demand that the context has to be properly taken into account when we interpret the text.

Hick finds it problematic to assert the Incarnation of Christ in the traditional form. The problem lies in the fact that "it implies the superiority of the Christian faith above other faiths" (150). This is further specified as follows: "If Jesus is *the* incarnation of God, then it suggests that 'the Christian religion, alone among the religions of the world, was founded by God in person'…" Cheetham now rightly remarks: "This is incompatible with the pluralistic picture that Hick wishes to present of Christianity being just one salvific religion amongst many" (150). This betrays Hick's primary preoccupation as defending his pluralistic view. He proposes pluralism in order to avoid any tint of superiority from the part of any religion. This would mean that he constructs a theory to suit his preconceived imagination rather than his commitment to truth or to the Real. Who taught that equality and fraternity are high values, if not Christianity? What is more important, avoiding a superimposed or attributed imaginary "superiority" or faith commitment to the revelation of "the Real"? Hick's implied premise that the Christian faith in Jesus as *the* incarnate God necessarily implies superiority, and, therefore, that this is not acceptable, is a prejudice and is itself questionable. There can be many occasions in everyday life where sometimes one's or one group's position is true and that of the others, not. Shall we then compromise, just to please every one? I do not want to claim any superiority to any religion, but to point out the hollowness of Hick's argument that truth claims imply superiority, which is in itself bad, and, hence, something to be avoided. By submitting oneself to God's revelation, one religion does not become *eo ipso* arrogant or claimant of a superiority. Jesus Christ has taught us the values of fraternal love, humility and service, and he lived himself all this radically.

If Hick considers that his pluralistic position is the best among the other possible and actual positions, one may now wonder, is he not, on his own terms, claiming superiority? By criticizing and discarding the theodicy of Augustine and others, Hick has indirectly claimed certain superiority to his own theory. And if the claim of superiority is an evil to be avoided, no one, including Hick, may propose any theory that claims to be better than others. In the world of science and technology you cannot accept this outlook. Should we now adopt the pluralistic "all are equally true and valid" position in the world of religions? Is it all so light or/and irrelevant what the different religions hold and have to say about many crucial and existential matters?

It is one thing to argue that all religious adherents have equal dignity and quite another to hold that all religions are in themselves equally true and valid responses to "the Real." There can be errors among humans; so too imperfections. The fact that all are humans with equal dignity does not lead us to the conclusion that what all of them hold is equally true.

For the sake of making all religions equal, Hick seems to propose to extend to all religions one religion's faith and self-understanding. But this is nonsensical and a violation of the faith of other religions. Why should one impose a faith that is foreign to them? It is positively against some religions to propose to them that their founders were all incarnations of God. For instance, Islam would never accept that Mohammed was an incarnation of God, or one of the *avatars*. If every religion believes the same thing and is same in all respects, what precisely is the meaning of *pluralism*?

It is disappointing to note that Hick is uncritically swallowing the opinions of certain scholars and comes to the conclusion "that the historical Jesus did not claim to be God" (148). We could agree with Hick if he would have qualified the assertion that Jesus did not claim it *explicitly*. To create the impression that Jesus did not claim at all in any way his divine status is to close one's eyes to the New Testament witness. It can be shown that Jesus had indirectly or latently claimed his divinity in many ways. How would now Hick explain Jesus' indirect claims involved in his forgiving the sins, demanding a radical discipleship, making himself superior to Moses and the prophets, expressing a special and unique relationship with God whom he called his Father? What made the early Jewish disciples of Jesus to believe that he is God, considering the strict

Jewish monotheism, if the faith had no basis in Jesus himself and in his self-understanding? Just because of the resurrection the disciples could not all of a sudden preach Jesus as God and Son of God. Much before the Councils of Nicea or Chalcedon we find in the New Testament ample evidence for this faith of the early Church in Jesus' true divinity. How can St. Paul refer to the transference of an Old Testament text (Is 45:23) to Jesus that was originally applied to God, "so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil 2:10-11)? The teachings of the Councils are not inventions but clarifications and explanations of the authentic apostolic faith when need arose against the background of heresies. That the Councils used philosophical terminology is to be understood in light of the exigency to elucidate the biblical faith in terms of the ontological mentality and language used by the heretics themselves. Replying to them only in the biblical language would not have solved the problem. The Councils also showed the boldness and openness to transcend any sort of a biblical fundamentalism as well. One may remember here that also Hick's use of the term "the Real" comes under this purview.

This book provides, thus, an occasion for an encounter and debate regarding Hick's philosophy, precisely because the author gives a good study and clear interpretation. He deserves praise and congratulations for the lucid language and the clarity of expressions with which he has brought out the main themes and thoughts of Hick.

Sebastian Athappilly

Richard C. Foltz, Frederick M. Denny, and Azizan Baharuddin, *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Publications of the Centre for the Study of World Religions, Harvard Divinity School, 2003, pages xliii + 584, ISBN: 0-945454-40-6.

The world's religions have traditionally been supporters of justice and equity among humans. While the human community is still striving to attain the goals of justice, it is clear that environmental justice is becoming part of these broad aspirations. The rights to pure air, clean water and fertile soil are being seen as fundamental human rights. Islam has a particular contribution to make in this field.

The traditional concern of Islam for social justice and care for the poor, the orphaned, and the widowed has a broader relevance that embraces concern for the natural environment as well. Protection of land and proper treatment of biodiversity are now being advocated by Islamic scholars and teachers. In addition, the unity of all reality (*tawhīd)* and the balance of nature (*mīzān)* as recognized by Islam constitute an important basis for religious ecology and environmental ethics. It is significant that the vital role of human beings as trustees of creation is highlighted in this book. This volume assembles voices from across the Islamic world that is speaking with depth, breadth, and urgency on the emerging alliance of Islam and ecology. The Qur'ān is replete with references to the precious resources of water, air, and land, and forbids wastefulness. The *hadiths* (sayings of the prophet) report Muhammad's concern for the protection of natural resources and their equitable availability to all. Clearly, from its origin, Islam offers a basis for ecological understanding.

Yet, the articulation of an Islamic environmental ethic in contemporary terms is quite new. It is a tragic reality that the poor suffer far more directly from environmental degradation than do the rich, who are better enabled to insulate themselves from its effects. On a global scale, a disproportionate percentage of the world's poor happen to be Muslims. Hence, the writers of this volume are more immediately concerned with issues of social justice and the human relationship with the Divine than they are with the state of the environment *per se*. In the perspective of many Muslim thinkers, environmental degradation is merely a symptom of the broader calamity that human societies are not living in accordance with God's will. Thus, a just society, one in which humans relate to each other and to God as they should, will be one in which environmental problems simply will not exist.

The essays in the first section, "God, Humans, and Nature," outline the Islamic view of the cosmic order. It is an appropriate introduction to the Islamic view about those planes where humans belong in the hierarchy of beings. Ibrahim Ozdemir, in his essay, "Toward an Understanding of Environmental Ethics from a Qur'ānic Perspective," contents that a

Muslim who correctly understands the relationship between the Creator, humans, and the rest of creation as stipulated in the Qur'ān will see in it an environmental ethic. L. Clarke, in his essay, "The Universe Alive: Nature in the *Masnavi* of Jalāl al-Din Rūmi," explores the cosmology found in the mystical poetry of Jala al-Din Rumi (1207-1273), one of the most influential and beloved of all the Sufi poets. Saadia Khawar Khan Chisti's essay offers an ecological commentary on the notion of *fitra*, understood as the primordial nature of things. Chisti goes on to posit that the original nature of humans is to live in accordance with their environment; thus, environmental consciousness is something that needs not to be taught, but simply awakened.

The next section, "The Challenge of Reinterpretation," brings the preceding view of traditional paradigms into a contemporary context. The essays invite us to look at how the established Islamic world-view can be applied to the environmental problems of the present day. Seyyed Hossein Nasr discusses the obstacles to practising Islamic environmental ethics in the modern world, and gives suggestions to overcome these obstacles. Mawil Izzi Dien, who has been one of the first Muslim intellectuals to make the environment a central concern, mentions the real - life crises of pollution, water scarcity, and other environmental issues facing Muslims today. S. Nomanul Haq makes an attempt to recover how traditional Islam can guide contemporary Muslims in dealing with the environmental crisis. Abdul Aiz Said and Nathan C. Funk bring an ecological reading to the traditional Islamic concepts of unity (*tawhīd*) and peace (*salām*), suggesting that environmental problems present a lack of the latter resulting from a failure to acknowledge the former. Othman Abd-ar-Rahman Llewellyn provides a comprehensive view of how traditional Islamic law addressed environmental management. Richard C. Foltz point the way from theory to practice, showing how Islamic principles are beginning to be applied to environmental protection.

The essays in the third section, "Environment and Social Justice," focus on a theme that is a central priority in Islam. Fazlun M. Khalid finds the roots of the environmental crisis in Western modernity, which has been imposed on Muslim societies for the past several centuries. Yasin Dutton sees environmental problems as arising largely from illegitimate profit seeking at the expense of human communities. Nawal Ammar argues that environmental issues must be addressed within a broader context that includes women's rights of equal access to both natural and social resources.

The fourth section, "Towards a Sustainable Society," looks at real-life issues of development facing Muslims today, many of which have environmental implications. Mohammad Aslam Parvaiz focuses on the Quranic concept of balance (*mīzān*) showing how current models of development are violating this principle. Safei-Eldin A. Hamed looks at development in contemporary Muslim societies within the wider scope of existing development paradigms. Nancy W. Jabbra and Joseph G. Jabbra present contrasting examples of family planning in Muslim societies, citing case studies from Egypt and Iran.

The fifth and concluding section focuses on the Islamic garden as a metaphor for Paradise. Attilio Petruccioli discusses ways in which traditional Muslim societies have manifested their place within the natural order through architecture and the building of gardens. James L. Wescoat, Jr., highlights the specific example of the royal gardens built under the Mughal emperors in Lahore during the seventeenth century.

The attempt by Muslims to discover what the tradition has to say about the global environmental crisis today has only recently begun, and this volume is fortunate to include many of the voices, which have been prominent in this welcome and praiseworthy endeavor.

This volume on "Islam and Ecology," is, indeed, an epoch making contribution not only to Muslims but also to the whole humanity, especially when we are struggling hard to tide over the environmental crisis. The contributors have made an honest and sincere attempt to elucidate the evident and occult references in the Holy Qur'ān to substantiate the need for environmental protection. Today we live in a world made up of human hands, a world recreated by human technology and scientific research, which is far removed from the eco-friendly world created by God. Hence, the statements on environmental problems and their solutions derived from the Qur'ānic verses are not exclusive ones but are also traceable in the Sacred Scriptures of other important world religions. What is highlighted in this volume is that an eco-friendly world is nothing but a world where humans submit totally to the divine will and abide by the divine law which is manifested through nature. This volume is a clarion call and a motivating force for a global united effort to create an eco-friendly world though it sounds a little bit utopian.

James Narithookil

G. C. Nayak, ***Mādhyamika Śūnyatā: A Reappraisal of Mādhyamika Philosophical Enterprise with Special Reference to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti***, New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, pages xi + 93.

In this intensely argued discussion Professor Nayak, who has a long and admirable career in teaching, writing and administrative service in India, sets the record straight concerning the proper assessment of Nagarjuna's position, a position that has been mischaracterized by some (Harsh Narain) as nihilist and by others (Th. Stcherbatsky, T. R. V. Murti, etc.) as absolutist. *Śūnyatā*, Nāgārjuna's chosen term characterizing the actual nature of things, is not emptiness or void, nor is it the absolute. It is useful to have collected in one place the reasons for once and for all rejecting these two misunderstandings on the part of past (or, in the case of Narain, near-present) writers, although I hardly think the establishment of the correct interpretation of the term is by now news to students of Buddhist thought as it once was. Nayak is certainly correct in reminding us that Nāgārjuna meant by the term *śūnyata* the essencelessness (*nihsvabhāvatā*) of things and neither their nonexistence nor any mystical, superior status. By 'essencelessness' what is being rejected is the notion that anything is independent of causes and conditions, that there are any permanent entities.

Nayak, however, is not content merely with setting the record straight on that score. He has other opponents in mind whose opinions on related matters he finds inadequate. Ninian Smart is taken to task for suggesting "How can one really have loving benevolence for empty beings?" introducing a topic which leads Nayak to an extended assessment of how Madhyamika is no less insistent than Advaita Vedānta on the implications for morality and altruism being exemplified in the liberated person, whether *bodhisattva* or *jīvanmukta*. He finds fault with Ganeshwar Mishra for seeming to undervalue the morality of Advaita (and by implication of Madhyamaka as well) when Mishra suggests that the ignorance (*avidyā*) which blocks one from liberation is "a mere linguistic error or confusion," that Śamkara's philosophy is merely a linguistic analysis.

I find myself convinced by Nayak certainly as regards the main argument and also with most of the reasons he gives for his conclusions. Perhaps the most telling parallels he draws are with the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein: as he quotes Wittgenstein, "Philosophy leaves everything as it is," which Nayak adduces to help justify his contention that the enlightenment gained by the liberated persons "has no conflict with our normal awareness," that "the only difference between the enlightened person who is free and the unenlightened one who is in bondage is that the former remains undisturbed and patient through all his afflictions caused by *prārabdha* whereas the latter is impatient and suffers on account of this." The conclusion drawn is that the liberated Madhyamika or Advaitin is perfectly capable of, and, indeed, ideally situated for, the loving benevolence towards others that Smart finds lacking in an "empty being." Nayak's point seems well taken in the context of Madhyamaka and Advaita: does it extend as well to all the other *darśanas* that comprise the panoply of Indian viewpoints on liberation? Mahāyānists and Advaitins claim not, but if Nayak's explanation is correct his conclusion can, I think, be generalized to cover all the classical systems.

Karl Potter

Archie Gonsalves, ***How Did I Begin? A Western and an Indian Perspective on the Beginning of Human Individual***, Mysore: Dhyanavana Publications, 2002, pages Li + 416, ISBN: 81-901250-2-0.

The work under review is a revised version of the doctoral dissertation of Dr. Archie Gonsalves, at the Alfonsian Academy of Lateran University, Rome. Praiseworthy assay has been made throughout the work by the author to maintain a trait of pro-life approach and to explore the nuances and related concerns of the widely disputed issue on the beginning of human individual in both Western and Eastern world. Nevertheless, Archie fences the endeavour with Norman M. Ford's *Magnum Opus*, *When Did I Begin*? for a Western perspective, and Ayurveda – an Indian system of medicine – for an Eastern perspective. The author deserves our appreciation unequivocally for the selection of the theme, for there is an ongoing debate on Pro-life versus Pro-choice and a right answer acceptable to all, on the beginning of human individual, is the need of the time: because it will, in turn, tell upon our stand on a wide range of bioethical issues such as post-coital abortive contraception, prenatal diagnosis, technically assisted procreation, in vitro fertilization, embryo experimentation, stem-cell research, and human cloning. The thesis purports, however, to respect life by upholding human dignity and to bridge the lacuna between East and the West on the beginning of human individual and leaves the question "when begins the human Individual?" unanswered, lest the author succeeds where the fields of biology and philosophy fail without precision (144). Archie deserves our acclaim for a systematic and lucid presentation of a critical and comparative evaluation of both the position of Ford and Ayurveda on the beginning of human Individual.

The crux of the introductory chapters, in the first part, is the historical background of the legislation of current teachings of the Catholic Church on the attitude towards pre-born babies. With the contention that the "Declaration on Abortion" issued by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, does not explicitly speak of the moment in which the spiritual soul is infused and the acceptance of the instruction that "life from its conception is to be guarded with greatest care and the one who will be a man is already one," the author switches over to the study of Ford's masterpiece, *When did I begin?* The focal points of Ford's thesis, as stated by the author, are 1) When does a human individual begin to exist? and 2) Is every human being, human person too? Being an Aristotelian-Thomist in his approach, Ford, makes a subtle distinction between genetical and ontological individuals. Pointing to identical twinning at the cleavage stage, Ford declares that a human individual begins when the embryo ceases to be a cluster of more or less homogeneous cells, i.e., at the appearance of the primitive streak at day 14 from the moment of conception. In answering to the second question, Ford affirms, "there is no doubt in my mind that the three expressions (Person, Human individual, Human being) may refer equally to a member of our human species." The author notes that Ford, in line with Aristotle, believes in delayed ensoulment.

A fairly good portion in the first part is dedicated to a critique of Ford's position by taking support from the criticisms levelled against it by a few others, especially, Paul Flaman, Anthony Fisher, Anthony Zimmerman, etc. The author observes that Ford fails to address the question, who is an individual? The most evident weakness in Ford's presentation is that he does not answer satisfactorily, why the genetic code in the zygote does not suffice to constitute or define a human individual in an ontological sense. The author forgets not, in his critique, to rule out Ford's theory of delayed ensoulment.

The cryptic issue on the beginning of human individual, in the second part, is viewed from a different angle, i.e., from an Eastern perspective. For a biological apprehension of human individual, Archie resorts to Ayurveda. The *Vedas, Upanishads* and the *Bhagavatgīta* perceive human individual as having divine origin, identical with universal being and a unity of spirit (*purusha* or *ātman*) and matter (*Prakṛti*) respectively. The second chapter, in this section, supplies an orientation to Ayurvedic system with some of its sources of literature of which writings of *Charaka* and *Suśruta* are given special attention; so also it has a brief discussion about the fundamental principles – the most important one is to establish and preserve a harmonious relationship between the great and singular macrocosm and individual microcosms – and the philosophical foundation that are chiefly rooted in *Nyāya-Vaiśesika*, *Sānkhya* and Buddhist Philosophy, etc.

The axis of concentration is shifted from Ayurveda in general to Ayurvedic biology in particular, in the third chapter of this part. In the genesis, we find a lengthy discussion on the functions and nature of *śukra* (male gamete) and *śonita* (female gamete), how and what of menstruation, sacredness of coitus, and preparation prior to it, etc. The author quotes *Charaka* on the issue of temporality of ensoulment: "The development of human embryo began just when the semen and the ovum came in contact within the womb of the female and at once the soul descended into it and the embryo was ready to develop." The author points out that the Ayurveda developed ways and means to protect life in all its prenatal phases of development and even after that. On contraception and abortion in Ayurveda, he says: "It is not at all true that in Indian society there were no instances where means were adopted to check population. The world's most ancient text in favour of family planning is found in the *Rgveda*." In the last chapter, Archie seems to be on the look out for answers to some of the difficulties raised by Ford, such as who is an individual?, what constitutes his identity?, problems of identical twinning and the eventual postponement of ensoulment.

The last part, namely, "A Comparative Perspective," is an attempt of Archie to discover some dialogical meeting points between West and East on the beginning of human individual in the light of what is discussed in the preceding chapters, tabulating them under three titles, science, religion and philosophy. Under the title "A Critical Appraisal," Archie, observes that the issue of the "beginning of human individual" is double faceted, i.e., it includes the following two issues: "when did I begin?" and "how did I begin?" The primary concern of the Western perspective, and Ford, in particular, has been always to identify the precise moment when the human individual begins. Whereas in the Indian perspective, in reference to the beginning of the human individual, we never come across the question 'when?' Right from Vedic times down to our days there has been always an interest to know more and more about the early stages of human development. Therefore, the question they have kept on asking is only, "how did I begin?"

There are, in my view, a few defects, which are impediments in granting a credit of perfection to the work. 1) Plausibility of the inclusion of dual dimensional nature of the issue of the beginning of human individual, which is observed as the main distinction between Western and Eastern perspectives, in the section on convergences between East and West, is not made clear. 2) The idea of the first paragraph under the heading "The Complex Process of Fertilization" in the seventh chapter seems to be overlapping in the first paragraph of the "Conception According to Ayurvedic Authors" in the eighth chapter. 3) There are at least twenty noticed errata within the text. The author has failed to pay adequate attention to proofreading. However, as an addendum, I must admit the fact that in comparison with the magnitude of trouble the author has taken in tackling the puzzle of the beginning of human individual in a simple and coherent manner and the wider purview of the topic, the defects mentioned above are trivial.

Shibin Thuniampral

Subscription Rates

Annual Subscription:

India	Rs. 140.00
Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka	Rs. 300.00
All Other Countries (Air Mail)	$30.00 or £15.00

Advance Subscription for Three Years:

India	Rs. 360.00
Foreign (Air Mail)	$80.00 or £41.00

Foundation Subscription (life membership):

India	Rs. 10,000.00
Other Countries	$600.0 (or its equivalent)

Single Copy:

India	
Current Issue	Rs. 40.00
Back Issue	Rs. 50.00
Foreign (Air Mail)	
Current Issue	$ 7.00 or £3.00
Back Issue	$ 8.00 or £4.00

Editorial Correspondence:

All Manuscripts for publication should be typed double space with footnote separate (MLA style) and sent in duplicate or a digital copy to:

The Chief Editor
Journal of Dharma
Dharmaram College
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: editor@journalofdharma.com
Fax: +91-80-5111 6000

All business correspondence should be addressed to:

Executive Secretary
Journal of Dharma
Dharmaram College
560 029 Bangalore, India
E-mail: info@journalofdharma.com

Reg. No. R.N. 27399/75 ISSN: 0253-7222

JOURNAL OF DHARMA

An International Quarterly of World Religions

Forthcoming Issues

2003 Vol. XXVIII:

4. Prayer in World Religions

2004 Vol. XXIX:

1. Hindutva: Cultural and Religious Response
2. Gender Justice Today
3. Modern Saints of *Bhakti* Tradition
4. Business Ethics: New Perspectives

International Indexing: ***Journal of Dharma*** is indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals, Chicago; in Arts & Humanities Citation Index (A&HCI) and Current Contents/Arts & Humanities (CC/A&B) of the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI), University City Science Center, Philadelphia, PA 19104; in Philosopher's Index, Philosopher's Information Center, 1616 E. Wooster St., Bowling Green University, OH 43402; in American Theological Library Association - Religion Indexes, 5600 South Woodlawn Ave., Chicago, IL. 60637; in Bowker Serials Bibliographies, 1180 Avenue of the Americas, NY 10036; in Science of Religion published by Root and Branches, Cambridge, England.

Microfilms: University Microfilms International, Michigan. Religious & Theological Abstracts: Myerstown, PA 17067.

Website: www.journalofdharma.com

Published by
Dharma Research Association
Centre for the Study of World Religions
Dharmaram College, 560 029 Bangalore, India

Printed at
Dharmaram School of Printing
560 029 Bangalore, India